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SPORTS



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THE Swell-Headed SOPH

A Football Novel
By TRACY MASON

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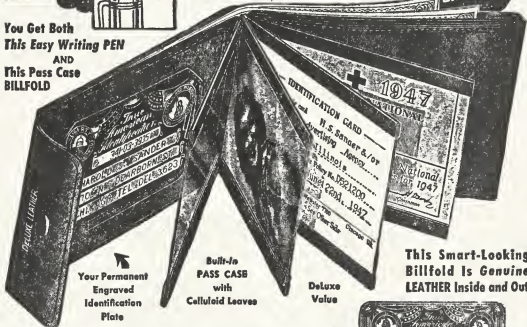


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THRILLING SPORTS

Vol. 19, No. 3

A Thrilling Publication

November, 1947



Featured Football Novelet **THE SWELL-HEADED SOPH**

By **TRACY MASON**

His name was Kilborn, Edward J., and there was no better end in football—or so he thought until the varsity began a new game which must have been called Let's Step on Kilborn's Face! 11

TWO OTHER COMPLETE NOVELETS

THE MAGNIFICENT McCLOSKEY.....Irvin Ashkenazy 40

The great Dudley McCloskey was torn between two careers—the poetry that was in his soul and the dynamite that was in his fists!

BIG LEAGUE BUSER.....John Wilson 68

Rookie Perk Prather looked like the answer to a manager's dream, but Big Moose Jordan didn't realize that the dream was only a nightmare!

SHORT STORIES

SOCCER SCREWBALL.....H. C. Butler 30

This Ernie Entwistle could be a clown—or he could be a goalie.

WHAT IT TAKES.....William O'Sullivan 55

Everybody said Biggers was a great track coach and could handle a team.

GRAMBO THE GREAT.....Roger Fuller 82

Clerka and his teammates could dish out mayhem on the lacrosse field, but—

EIGHT MEN AND A MITE.....T. W. Ford 92

The crew came up to the race at Poughkeepsie—ready to make trouble.

SPECIAL FEATURES

THE SIDELINE.....Cap Fanning 6

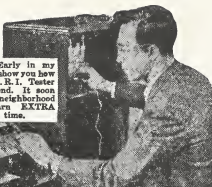
THRILLS IN SPORTS.....Jack Kofoed 63

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The SIDELINE



A DEPARTMENT FOR SPORT FANS CONDUCTED BY CAPT. FANNING

ONE of the most vital factors in any sport which uses a ball as its bone of contention (in this instance we except water polo and perhaps volley ball) is the matter of spin. We all know how vital is spin in baseball, both for the pitched and batted ball, and in football when the punt is on.

It is spin that controls a tennis ball, not only in the air but on the bounce. It is spin that causes the golfer to overshoot the green or to have his approach hold the turf near the cup. Spin off the backboard, well controlled, has won many a basketball contest, a handball match or a game of squash racquets. And in croquet, billiards and pocket billiards its mastery means success.

Yet hardly a spectator at any of the above games understands the principles of applying spin—and all too few players really know what they are doing or—and this is equally important—what their opponents are up to.

The Spiral Principle

Until comparatively modern times the forward pass in football was hurled end over end from an odd sort of wrist grip—and this despite the fact that the principle of the spiral was known to Archimedes. Punts were booted in the same fashion with definitely limited results.

When a football is booted off the side of the foot to give it a spiral at a trajectory high enough to give the ends time to get downfield under it, it can be a truly devilish thing to catch. Because the ball is pointed at both ends, it often tends to slide backward down its own trajectory, becoming a darting, twisting, often unjudgable object. Many a football game is decided against expert forecasting when such a kick is dropped.

When the object of the punt is merely distance, however, as when a quick kick is called, the end over end has the call on the spiral. Such a ball, kicked correctly and with sufficient distance to clear the safety man's head, will roll like a rabbit toward the enemy goal. This too is frequently a game decider.

But darned few college teams boast a booter who can get both sorts of kicks away

at will. For mastery of spin takes practise and most coaches and players prefer to emphasize passing, running or defense to kicking. But those who do appreciate spin on the kick have a habit of staying on the winning side.

Of all ball games, however, it seems to us that lawn tennis is the one where spin counts the most. Squash, where it is equally or even more important, is still not played widely enough to provide a good example.

In tennis, the spin given the ball by one player, has a direct effect upon his opponent's next shot. A baseline driver can often break up the attack of a foeman who rushes the net by feeding him low, undercut drives. When volleyed, such chop shots tend to find the net—where a top-spin drive will clear it with plenty to spare.

On the other hand, when he wants to make his opponent chase a cross-court drive or one deep in the corner, the good player will put top spin on the ball—causing it to leap away from the defending player as it bounds. The dropshot, like the slowball in baseball, is delivered with virtually no spin at all—thus causing it to fade and bound scarcely at all just after clearing the net.

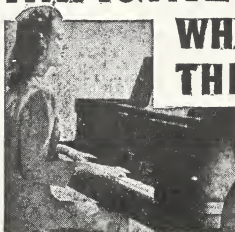
American Twist

In serving, by cutting across the ball with his racket toward the outside, a player can impart to the shot a high bound in a lateral direction opposite to that it has taken in flight. This is, roughly, what is known as the American twist. Because it can be easily controlled, it is the classic second service of the good player, who can count on it if his hard-flat-hit first service is a fault. Unless hit cleanly and hard the twist can cause plenty of errors or setups for the server following in to the net.

Golf, too, has its spin problems on more than approach shots. Because the striking surface of the clubhead is so small and the handle of the club so long, any slight deviation from the line of flight results in that bane of golfers from duffer to big-time professional money winner, the off-line shot.

(Continued on page 8)

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THE SIDELINE

(Continued from page 6)

When the clubhead is hit too openly, the result is the slice, which not only sends the ball far to the right but causes it to lose distance through undercutting, not only on the fly but on the bounce. A too-closed club-face has the opposite effect—causing the ball to curve far to the left and giving it the distance and bound that carry it far into the rough.

It is a curious axiom that almost all spin is harmful in any game unless it is applied for control of length and bounce along the desired line of flight of the ball. This is the factor which makes the follow-through (frequently scoffed at as mere posing by the un-initiate) so important.

By hitting right on through long after the moment of impact, the kicker, club-user or racketeer insures that he has hit it along the true line of flight. For the direction in which he has actually hit or kicked the ball is only revealed in his subsequent action (the follow through) and in the line of flight the ball must take. By the time the latter is evident it is too late to make corrections.

At any rate spin is no negligible factor in ball—no matter what form of ball you are playing or watching. It will repay study in either case.

Letters From Our Readers

We get some of the darnedest queries in this department. For instance:

PAGING METHUSELAH by Frank Hynes

Dear Cap: In debating with a fellow where I work as to what sport is the oldest in origin, I claimed lacrosse was it. He is from Scotland and gave soccer the nod. Could you please give us some information to settle our argument. And how about some soccer or lacrosse stories in THRILLING SPORTS?—719 North Russell Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

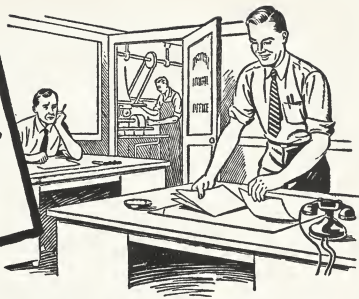
We have run a number of stories on both sports, Frank, and shall continue to as and when they come in of acceptable caliber. But, oh mama, you really handed the Cap a rugged Joe in that early origin question!

As usual, when fairly stumped, the Cap turns to Frank Menke's **ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SPORTS**, than which there is no whither when it comes to digging out obscure facts of this nature. So—let's look at Mr. Menke's record.

Unfortunately for all of our sakes, Mr.

(Continued on page 111)

When the
new man moves
around you—



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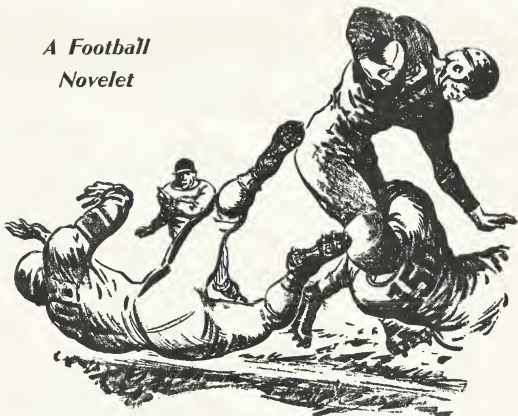
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*A Football
Novelet*



I went sailing by and skidded into the turf about three yards past him

THE SWELL-HEADED SOPH

By TRACY MASON

His name was Kilborn, Edward J., and there was no better end in football — or so he thought until the varsity began a new game which must have been called Let's Step on Kilborn's Face!

CHAPTER I

One Headgear, King Size

THE sun might have been shining bright on somebody's old Kentucky home at the time, but at Blairden University, on the hill, it was raining ant-eaters and caribou. The water thundered down outside Corchrane Gymnasium and there were times its noise against the long windows forced Old Man Long to raise his voice almost to a

shout in addressing the football hopefuls that were gathered in the gym.

Old Man Long wasn't really so old, come to think of it. He must have been in his early sixties, or thereabouts, but to the boys who had turned out for football practice he seemed only a few years younger than the Natural Bridge in Virginia. That was because, to us neophytes, the name of Jake Long, Head Coach at Blairden U., was always uttered with reverence, because Coach Long had been Old Man Long at Blairden when the

rest of us were wearing three-cornered pants.

We were sophomores, most of us, who stood on the gym floor that day and listened to Old Man Long talk. Some of us had played for Blairden's Frosh team the previous year and now we were up in the big time, out to make the Red B, and all of us willing to break our hearts and our backs, if need be, to do it.

You know how it is on the opening day of football practice, or maybe you don't. Every man who turns out has a secret vision of himself carrying the ball across the line against Stanning in the big game, or of saving the score for Blairden with a miraculous tackle, and then of having Old Man Long himself shake our hand with fervent thanks, tears streaming down his wrinkled face, for what we had done on the gridiron for the old school.

"Corn? Well, maybe. But looking back on it, I personally, prefer to think it's a healthy dream for a bunch of kids to entertain. Much better, for instance, than the dream a bunch of Nazi kids cherished of killing so many other humans that they won a nod from The Great Paperhanger.

GETTING back to the rainy day in the gym, I was with the sophomores, trying not to look envious of the juniors and seniors who were grouped closer to Old Man Long. There was Hacky Hoffman, Blairden's great tackle, and Gook Crane, captain and center, and Miller Kyle, whose run against Stanning the previous year had been almost, not quite, good enough to beat our ancient rival.

There were other greats and near-greats that we, as freshmen, had watched play the year before, when our own frosh squad wasn't busy, and now they were going to be our team-mates—we all hoped.

"Men," Old Man Long was saying, "there's no reason at all why we can't turn out a great team this year, if we all work together, and work hard. You probably know that Stanning has been lucky enough to keep most of its last year's team while we were hit hard by graduations. Oh, not that we haven't got a mighty fine nucleus with Captain Crane and Kyle and Hoffman and the others, but we might as well face it that Stanning is starting out the season, at

least, with the advantage. And there's no use kidding ourselves that the Stanning game is the one we've got to take.

"So remember, when the going gets rough, that the man who let's down the least little bit, the boy who loafes when the coaches' eyes are somewhere else, the fellow who breaks training on the sly, who doesn't go all out for the team every minute, is helping Stanning, letting the crowd across the river have the laugh on this school."

A moment's impressive silence.

"That's all, then," Old Man Long said.

"Because of the weather, we'll confine this session to getting you all registered and assigned to lockers, getting your equipment issued to you. Tomorrow, we hope, this heavy dew—" he paused here and we all laughed heartily at this oldest of gags—"will have stopped so we can hit the turf and see just who can do what."

He stepped down off the platform while the assistant coaches began getting their groups to line up and register. I shoved along with the others and, like all the rest with the possible exception of a blase senior who had heard Old Man Long give that talk before, I was highly resolved that never—never, that is—would I give Stanning, the hated school across the river, the chance to chuckle at me.

"Kilborn," I told the assistant student manager behind the desk, when it came my turn. "Edward J., sophomore. Second string end, freshman team, last year."

"Gotcha, Ed," the boy with the glasses behind the desk said, grinning at me. I recognized him as somebody I'd seen around, a member of my class. "Next man."

I drew my equipment next. The jersey they threw at me had the number 108 on its back. I knew enough about varsity ball to know that after the squad had been weeded out, after the mob had been cut down to size, the numbers would be reissued. The regulars of the previous year, of course, would keep their numbers and the newcomers would be assigned a number that would be theirs as long as they played football for Blairden.

There was something of a ceremony connected with the allotment of numbers to the youngsters coming up from freshman who had made good. That was



I saw Hacky bearing
down on me, looking
plenty sore

when the varsity captain and the other regulars lined up and shook the new man's hand and wished him luck. It was quite a day in the life of a Blairden football player.

My father had won a Blairden number, 16, and my older brother, Jed, had won his, the number 44, and now it was up to me to show them that I could do as well. Perhaps I wouldn't star, as Jed had starred, but at least I was determined to make the varsity, to win my number.

Of course, I told myself, I'd had hard luck on the freshman team. I'd made the squad, all right, but only as a substitute when, as a matter of fact, I really had been a better man than either Williams or Thomasini the first string ends. I convinced myself that I wasn't being egotistical about that, it was simply a fact.

But I had never gotten along with Ackerson, the frosh coach. I didn't like him and he didn't like me, and both of us knew how matters stood. It had all started one day at the tackling dummy when I made a clean miss and made a gag about it and he jumped me, telling me that I was kidding the game instead of being serious about it. Which might have been true, but, after all, it was only the freshman team, not the varsity, and a man couldn't take the frosh eleven as grimly as he took the big B squad.

Anyway, I spoke out of turn, I guess, and Ackerson bawled me out. And from that day on my name was mud—Mr. Mud—as far as the freshman coach was concerned.

BUT this, I swore, was going to be different. Whatever anybody might say about Old Man Long, they had to admit that he was entirely fair. What Ackerson thought about me, whatever kind of a report on me he had made to the head coach, wouldn't make any difference in my chances of making the varsity, of getting my number.

And I was determined to work hard for the head coach, harder than I'd ever worked for Ackerson, harder than I'd worked at prep school, where making the varsity squad had been almost as important as making the Blairden eleven was now. I intended to show up Ackerson for what I was sure he was, a sore-head who didn't have a sign of a sense of humor, a man who held a grudge and

kept the better football player on the bench simply because he didn't like him personally.

Thomasini and Williams, of course, had come up along with me, but I wasn't worrying about beating either of them out for a berth on the varsity. I knew that if I really applied myself and wasn't working under the handicap of having the coach sore at me, I could outshine those two gents like the Kookhinoor diamond would outshine a ten-cent-store gem.

Blairden had two varsity ends left over from the previous year, both second-string men. One was Terry, a tall, stringbean senior who never had been too hot, in my estimation, and the other was a runt by the name of Hollingwood. Hollingwood was fast and a better than fair defensive man, but he was always getting hurt. If some bruiser crashed into Hollingwood in one of the early games and he was carried off the field, as he had been times innumerable—well, things didn't look too bad for Kilborn, Edward J. They didn't look bad at all.

All the football players of my fraternity—and we had more than our share of them—gathered for a bull session that night, as was customary. Hollingwood was there, and Hacky Hoffman, Duke Gillespie, Fred March, and Thomasini. Yeah, he'd been pledged to my fraternity at the same time that I had although, speaking honestly, I never could quite see what the brothers saw in him. Oh, he was all right, I suppose, but not the type for my money.

He was a thick-set, black-haired guy and he took everything seriously. I mean, Italians are supposed to be always laughing and singing and stuff like that, and Thomasini's folks had come over from the Old Country, I guess, or were first generation Americans at the most, and still the fellow hardly ever smiled. In fact, usually he had his forehead wrinkled up, trying to dope out something that was perfectly obvious to everybody else.

"You two sophs have got a lot of responsibility on your shoulders," Hacky said, during the bull session. "If you both hit varsity, and Hollingwood doesn't get his annual busted leg, we'll have the end positions pretty well sewed up for the fraternity. Then, with Duke having a fair chance for the backfield and March due for a good year, the lodge

will be close to the top in football standings."

"I dunno," Thomasini said, slowly. "I guess this will be a lot different from freshman football and I just got that frosh end job by the skin of my teeth."

"Sure, you can do it, Tommy," Hollingwood said. "Heck, it's the same game, still played with eleven men on a side. You're a cinch for the job."

"And you won't have to worry about me," I said. "Without the coach down on me, you'll see some action out there in the end spot this year, courtesy of Ed Kilborn."

Well, I didn't mean it the way it must have sounded. At least I didn't think I said it in a way that deserved the response I got from the others. Everybody in the room, it seemed like, swung their eyes in my direction, as though I was a two-year-old baby who had suddenly started spouting Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. There wasn't too much friendliness in those eyes either, and the silence got sort of uncomfortable after a spell. It was Thomasini who spoke up first, in that serious way of his.

"Sure," he told the others. "Ed's a cinch for a varsity berth this year. He's got what it takes."

MENTALLY, I cursed the fact that it had been Thomasini who had spoken up for me. After all, the guy *had* beaten me out of a first string job the previous year and for him to be sounding off like that now sounded rather patronizing to me.

"Sure," Hacky Hoffman was saying. "Ed's got what it takes, but will he give out with it?"

"Just what," I asked Hoffman, "do you mean by that?"

Hoffman was a senior and House president and he never had been known for mincing his words.

"I just mean," he told me, as blunt as a club, "that you loafed on the freshman team last year. When the going got rugged, you laid down. You wouldn't work for your job. You started sounding off about Ackerson being down on you and what was the use of trying with the coach against you. You goofed off and lost the chapter a chance to put another man on the first frosh team."

"What difference does the frosh team make?" I asked, getting hot. "It's the varsity that counts in fraternity pres-

tige. I'll bet not one out of five people on the campus knows who was on last year's freshman first string."

"It makes a lot of difference, that frosh squad," Hacky told me. "It's a sort of testing ground, the place where they find out if a man plays real football or pick-up-sides kid stuff. You think Old Man Long doesn't keep his eye on the freshman club? Well, he does and what he sees there gives him a line on what he can expect when the men come up to try out for varsity. And I don't like the line he got on you, Ed."

"That was last year," I said. "Watch me this year."

"I will," the big tackle said, heavily. "And if I see you fluffing your chance to make varsity because you're acting lazy, or you have your feelings hurt, or for any reason other than because you're just not good enough to make the grade, you'll be hearing from me."

"He'll make it," Thomasini said, again.

"Thanks," I cracked. "It's good to know I've got at least one rooter in this bunch."

"Take it easy, Ed," Duke Gillespie said. "We're all for you. Hacky was just giving you the pre-season pep talk, that's all."

I got up out of my chair and headed for the door.

"I don't need any pep talks," I told the brothers. "What I need is a chance to get out there and show Old Man Long who's the best end prospect he has on the field. And that goes for you, Hollingwood, and you, Tommy. I'm warning you, I'm out to get that job and all's fair in love—and football."

CHAPTER II

Blimp Jordan

I LEFT them with that snapper and went down the hall to my room, the one I shared with Blimp Jordan. I knew I shouldn't have flapped my lip as much as I had at Hacky, the House president, but all this stuff about me laying down on the frosh squad had burned me up. Ribbing a guy when he was a freshman was okay, but I was a sophomore now and Hacky nor anybody else could expect me to take that sort of stuff with a smile.

Blimp was lying in bed, as usual, eating candy bars. He was a big fat guy and he kept getting fatter by the day, it seemed. For all his blubber, though, he was a good guy, easy-going, good-natured, and full of laughs. I guess he was the wealthiest man in the school, but there was nothing snooty about Blimp. To me, he was the ideal roommate, even though he was too big for me to wear any of his clothes.

"Have a candy bar," he said, when I walked in. "Take two. Good for you. Packed full of vitamins, it says on the wrapper. Eat a case of these and go out and beat Stanning single-handed."

I took one of the bars and sat down on the side of the bed to unwrap it. I guess my face showed I was still sore at the cracks made in the bull session, because Blimp stared at me and started asking questions.

"Why the sultry frown? I thought you football mugs got together every night to pat each other on the back and say how good you-all were. What's the matter, didn't they pat you hard enough?"

I snorted.

"The pats I got were slaps in the puss," I said. "It seems that Brother Hoffman has got his mind all made up that I won't make the team. Apparently, he's got it all figured out that I'm going to dog it when the going gets rough."

"Brother Hoffman," said Blimp, reaching for another bar, "is a born disciplinarian. He is forever looking on the seamy side of life, expecting the worst, a pessimist of the first water. I'll never forget the time he tried to get me to go out for football. Me! Football! And knowing how I loathe all forms of physical exercise."

He lowered his voice to imitate Hacky's deep boom.

"Jordan," he said, his round face twisted in an impressive frown, "this fraternity expects every man to do his duty to Blairden. You will report for football tomorrow. And there'll be no excuses."

"What did you do?" I asked, when I stopped laughing.

"Do?" asked Blimp. "I trotted nimbly over to the infirmary and got Doc to give me an examination. Then I trotted nimbly back to the house here with a little slip of paper that said that unless I lost twenty-five or thirty pounds, I could not

indulge in violent endeavor."

"And Hacky?" I asked.

"Brother Hoffman," Blimp sighed, "tried to get me to reduce, not knowing that better men than he'll ever be had tried and failed. He finally admitted defeat, said some pithy things about individuals who were reluctant to suffer for Blairden and retired from the scene, disgusted."

We both were laughing when the door opened and the man about whom we had been talking, Hacky Hoffman, barged in. He took a look at the assortment of candy wrappers surrounding Blimp and his nose wrinkled.

"Blimp," he said, "I want to talk to you."

"If it's about football," Blimp said calmly, "no thanks."

"It's about football," Hacky said, in his deep voice, "and there'll be no brush-off this time."

Blimp hoisted himself into a sitting position and stared at the big House president.

"Are you serious?" he asked Hacky. "Do you mean I've got to walk way over to the infirmary again and get another physical examination?"

"You do," said Hacky, nodding grimly, "but this time you'll get the examination *after* you've lost thirty pounds or so."

Blimp sank back on his pillows again.

"The man's mad," he murmured.

"I'm not," Hacky said. He reached into his pocket and brought out a letter. "But your father's liable to be, unless you get busy and start melting off some of that lard."

BLIMP popped his eyes at that one. If there was anything that disturbed Jordan's placid soul it was his father. More than once he had held forth long and earnestly upon the subject of Jordan, Senior, and I had gotten the impression that Blimp's father must be a cross between Scrooge, before his reformation, and one of the less desirable Roman Emperors, say Caligula.

"He's always threatening to cut off my money," he had mourned, on these occasions, "and he'll probably do it some day, too, if he gets sore enough."

"Just—just what has my father got to do with football?" Blimp managed to ask now.

Hoffman unfolded the letter and peered over it at the fat man on the bed,

for all the world like a stern school-teacher getting ready to announce the flunking list.

"The brothers," he announced finally, "are getting tired of seeing you lie around the house, stuffing yourself. I mentioned the matter to a couple of the fellows, pointing out that you're good guard material and the team is weak on guards. They all agreed that something drastic had to be done. So we wrote your father."

Blimp's round face lost its usual grin.

"You—you wrote my father?" he asked. "Taking a lot on yourselves, weren't you?"

"For your own good," Hacky said firmly, "as well as the good of the school. Anyway, your father says in this letter that if you don't go out for football and at least make an honest try, he'll—well, here, read it for yourself."

"I don't have to," Blimp said, and I never knew his voice could get so hard. "I know just what he said, about cutting off my allowance if I didn't follow your orders, Hoffman! And I want to tell you I think the whole deal is a dirty, rotten trick."

His voice got to be almost a wail.

"I'll never make the team in a million years," he said. "It'll just mean that I'll suffer and in the end they'll throw me off the squad, and all that agony will be for nothing."

"You'll try," Hacky Hoffman said. "You'll make an honest effort or I'll write another letter to your dad."

"Just who," I put in, "appointed you guardian of Blimp, Hoffman?"

The big tackle spun on me.

"You keep out of this Kilborn," he snapped. "You've got your own job to do—if you can. Which I doubt."

"You wouldn't want to make a little bet, would you?" I asked. "A bet on whether or not I make varsity?"

"I don't bet," Hoffman said, "but if I did, I'd be willing to give odds that before the training season's long gone you'll be dogging it, taking it easy, skipping the sweat with some excuse that somebody or other is down on you, the way you cry-babied about Ackerson."

I got up off the bed.

"I only wish," I said, "that you were an end or I was a tackle so I could get your job and send you to the bench, Hoffman. I'd get a kick out of seeing you go down to the second string, with

all your big talk and your holier-than-thou stuff."

"You talk a good game," Hacky sneered. He turned back to Blimp. "You get up at six tomorrow morning and get over to the gym. There's a physical ed class going on for the fats and the light-weights and I've fixed things up for you to join."

"Six!" Blimp squalled.

"Six," Hacky said. "I'll look in on the class and see how you're making out."

He reached over and gathered up the handful of candy bars that remained, stuffed them in his pocket.

"You'll get these back," he promised, "when you've shed thirty pounds—maybe."

"Fascism!" Blimp bawled. "Dictatorship! You—you Hitler, you!"

He was yelling at a closed door that Hacky had slammed behind him. He turned to me, tears close to his eyes.

"I won't do it!" he said. "Let my old man cut me off without a dime! Let him stop my allowance! Anything would be better than this. Six o'clock!"

"You think your father really would cut you off?" I asked. "Or was that all a bluff by Hoffman?"

BBLIMP'S sigh was one of utter exasperation.

"It's no bluff," he admitted. "I got a letter the other day from Dad that sounded kind of mysterious. Something about him being glad to see my fraternity brothers had my best interests at heart and knowing I'd cooperate with them, if I knew what was good for me. I didn't get it then, of course, though I do now. But I'll fool 'em. I'll let my father cut off my allowance. I'll resign from the fraternity. I'll—I'll—"

He spluttered around while I thought things over. If Blimp's father really would do something drastic like drying up the river of dough that flowed in my roommate's direction each month, it was a serious state of affairs for Kilborn, Edward J., as well as Jordan, Junior. Blimp was an exceedingly handy guy to have around, particularly toward the end of the month when my own meager allowance had completely disappeared.

Blimp was a ready man with a buck, not that I didn't always pay him back, but it was nice to have a loan account living in the same room with you. Also, there was Blimp's car, available for dates,

and Father Jordan might grab back that mammoth coupe, along with the allowance, if he were sufficiently aroused.

"Listen, Blimp," I said. "Maybe this would be a good idea, after all."

"You, too?" he asked, staring.

"No, but listen," I said. I went on to enumerate the advantages of a sylph-like figure, the healthy qualities of dieting, the glamour that went with a streamlined chassis—Blimp always liked the ladies, even if they did laugh at his elephantine attempts at romance—the advances made in dieting methods whereby the dietees actually was given substantial meals, even if the variety was lacking.

"You—you mean they wouldn't starve me?" Blimp asked, hopefully. "They'd let me eat?"

"Plenty," I said recklessly. "Of course they'd cut out some things, but there'd be lean steaks and—"

"Steak!" Blimp said, licking his lips. "I love steak."

I went on, talking faster than I ever had before in my life, I guess. I had visions of a Blimp with a limp wallet and the picture wasn't a pleasant one. Besides, I really was fond of the big bundle of blubber and I knew that Hacky Hoffman had him over a barrel this time. It irked me to have to go along with anything that Hoffman had engineered, but knowing that Blimp would be unhappy either way he moved, I thought I might as well swing him over to the way that would do him the most good, physically. And, I might add, financially.

I talked him into it and I managed to get him out of bed at six the next morning. For fear he'd duck into town and an early breakfast, I walked to the gym with him and saw that he was safely enrolled in the class for fats and thins that the physical ed teacher had started.

I was on my way back to the house when I met Hacky Hoffman, on his way to check up on my roommate.

"You can relax," I said. "I got him started, anyway."

He looked at me queerly. "Well, good," he said slowly. "I didn't think—"

"Anything for the team," I cut in. "Maybe they'll make a tackle out of Blimp, when he loses enough weight, and he'll get your position. Then we can play side by side and laugh at you, on the bench."

"I still think," Hacky told me, "that Blimp has a better chance of making varsity than you do, Kilborn. But if he doesn't, it'll be because he's just not good enough, not because he lies down when it gets bumpy going."

"I haven't lain down yet," I said.

"Not yet," Hacky said, nodding. "But our first real practice isn't till this afternoon."

And it was a real workout, it developed. Old Man Long believed in putting on the steam from the start, apparently, and there was none of the usual first-day lost motion about the training field that afternoon. I started sweating a couple of minutes after I reached the field and a was a limp wreck when the whistle finally blew.

"Twice around the field," Old Man Long yelled, through his megaphone, "and I don't want to see any fast walking."

WE STARTED out, all of us groaning and cussing, as every football player who ever lived groans and cusses at the order of a run-around before the rush for the locker-room. My days on the freshman team had taught me that, on the coach's order, there would be only enough hot water for showers for about half the crowd of candidates. That meant that the first men into the locker rooms and the shower room got the hot water and the others got the cold—and I do mean cold.

That's why I put on all the steam I had left in me to keep up with the leaders of the pack running around the track. The veteran regulars, of course, knew the same thing about the hot water and they weren't intending to let any newcomers cheat them out of a hot shower. It was a real twice-around and all of us were plenty bushed when we finally made the lockers. But I was right up there and my shower was piping hot.

Coming out of the shower room, I bumped into Hacky Hoffman just coming in.

"Something delay you?" I asked him. "Or were you loafing on the twice-around?"

"All right, smart guy," he said, through thin lips. "It so happens that Coach wanted to see a couple of us before we came in. A couple of the varsity men, that is."

I felt sorry for Blimp that night. All

my gaudy predictions of what he could eat had proven right, as far as they went. But, it appeared, they hadn't gone far enough. Yes, he could eat lean steak but the size of the piece was comparable to one of Blimp's usual mouthfuls. Spinach was heavily favored and he hated spinach, while potatoes were notably lacking, and he loved potatoes.

"Worst of all," he groaned, "that mug, Hoffman, got my diet list from the physical ed instructor and he's given it to the House Mother and you know how she's always been after me to reduce. I'll never make it!"

"Remember Papa," I said. "No diet, no dough."

CHAPTER III

Undiscovered Genius

ACTUALLY, I guess it was the horrible thought of not having the money he never had been without that made Blimp stick at the diet and exercises, at first, but there was something else that developed as the days went by. I got my first shock the afternoon I came in from football practice, completely done in, and found him strutting around the room in his shorts, trying to get angled reflections of himself in the glass. Usually, he had hurried past the looking glass when he was stripped down, and understandably, but now he was posing like a matinee idol in front of a crowd of bobby-soxers.

"Hey," he said, when I staggered in. "How do I look?"

"Awful," I said. "Let me at that bed."

"Awful, huh?" he asked, in an injured tone. "You know how much I've lost, already? Eight pounds, that's what! Yessir, eight pounds!"

I squinted at him critically and, by golly, there was a difference in that porpoise! Of course he was no clothing ad, but the roll of fat that had ballooned over the top of his shorts looked a little slimmer, at that.

"You're getting there, kid," I said. "Next stop, varsity guard."

He grinned at me dubiously.

"You think I got a chance of really making it?" he asked me. "Or was that Hoffman bum just laying it on?"

"Making it!" I gulped, staring at him.

Then I stopped short with the smart crack I had ready to say. The poor dope, I realized, was actually serious! Somewhere along the line, Blimp Jordan, the laziest man at Blairden, had dreamed a picture of himself in the red jersey of the Big B team! The diet, the exercise, something, had imbued Blimp with an ambition that he would have sniggered at only a few short days before.

"Sure," I said, with my fingers crossed. "Sure, you've got a chance."

"Gosh," Blimp breathed. "Would my father be proud of me if I made the team, even as a third-string bench-warmer!"

Keeping Father Jordan happy was my main idea, so I kept on encouraging Blimp, even though I secretly admitted that it was a foul trick to raise a guy's hopes for something that was absolutely impossible. Blimp make the team! Hah, it was to laugh!

But it was not to laugh that Kilborn, Edward J., wasn't having exactly a push-over to get on the first team himself. I worked at the tackling dummy, I shoved the bucking machine up and down the field, I sweated and I slaved and I wore myself out running up and down the field, snaring passes. And for what?

Well, I knew I was proving to Old Man Long and Hacky Hoffman that I was good. I was showing them that I could take the training grind and not dog it, that I made Thomasini and Williams, yes, and Hollingwood and Terry, look slightly sick in comparison.

I couldn't miss that year, and I was going to show up Ackerson, the frosh coach, for the bum he was in keeping a good man on second string just because of personalities. I was imagining how Ackerson would look when he found out that Kilborn, Edward J., had made first-string varsity, the first time out, under a coach who knew his business.

The others—Thomasini, Hollingwood, Williams, and Terry—weren't handing the job to me on a silver platter, either. They were all working hard, too. Thomasini in his dogged, uninspired way. Hollingwood as flashy and as fast as ever, but still possessing those brittle bones of his. Williams, better than he had been the year before but still not good enough to top me. And Terry, who could see his job slipping right away from him.

So what happened? So the first day of

scrimmage, Old Man Long got us all together and made a little speech.

"We're going to make up some squads now," he said, "so we can do some contact work. Now, I want it understood that the make-up of these teams isn't in the least permanent. The ones on the first team may be switched to the second, or the third, or lower. The fellows on the third team may move up to the first. This is just to get you men organized in working units. It's no reflection on your ability if you don't make the first team, nor does it mean you're in solid if you do make it."

ONE of the assistant coaches handed him a typed sheet of paper. I looked down at the ground, digging one toe into the turf, trying not to feel too satisfied with myself. After they read off those team lists, I was going to have a chance to really grin at Hacky Hoffman.

"A Team," read Old Man Long. "Backs, Kyle, Gross, Finch and Bottomley. Center, Crane. Guards, Olsen and Taggart. Tackles, Hoffman and Kusczinski. Ends"—here it comes—"Hollingwood and Thomasini."

Thomasini! If it had been Hollingwood and Terry, I could have understood. Old Man Long would just be giving the last year's man a pat on the back before shipping him off the squad, after a few days. But *Thomasini!*

Why, I told myself, that lug had never had the ability that I had, not even on the freshman squad when I was loafing and he was working his legs off to keep his place on the squad! And I had been sweating it out ever since the first day of practice, making Thomasini look like a monkey, and Old Man Long had picked *him* for the first team.

Yeah, the Coach could say all he wanted to about the try-out set-ups not meaning a thing, but I knew better. Getting on the first squad at the start was half the battle—you were in, and the first team always looked better than any other squad, naturally. The first team had the strength in the line—men like Crane and, well yes, Hackey Hoffman, to play beside. They handled the ball more than the second or third team, usually, and the Coach gave the first team more of his attention than the other squads, whether he meant to or not.

Yes, a man would have to be pretty bad to slip off the first squad, once he was put there. But he could be one of the classiest players in the game if on the third team and his teammates would make him look so terrible nobody would ever notice what he could do. And there he'd rot.

Well, I told myself, there would be one consolation in being a second team man. I'd play offensive against the defensive tackle and Hacky Hoffman would be bound to come up against me some day. And when that day arrived, I intended to make Brother Hoffman look like the biggest chump that ever put on a headgear.

"Ends," Old Man Long was reciting, as he called off the second team list, "Terry and Kling."

I shook my head, despite myself, to clear it of the dizziness that took over. Kling was a junior who had been up the year before but who hadn't made the grade. I hadn't paid any attention to him this year, figuring him for a nobody who'd be dropped from the squad as soon as they started swinging the axe. And he had made the second team end spot and Kilborn, Edward J., sophomore, was dropped back to the third team, or worse still, due for the axe himself.

I could hardly hear Old Man Long while he read off the names of the third team. Yeah, I was there all right, and I felt like making a sarcastic bow and thanking the Coach for remembering I was around, thanking him for not putting me on the Milligans, which is the name of the last squad, comprised of men who are almost, but not quite, hopeless.

The Milligans are the boys who really get the bumps at Blairden. They do all the work and get none of the glory, unless you call the dizzy banquet they give themselves at the end of the season glory. I always thought it would take an awful sap to refrain from turning in his suit when he was named to the Milligans, but some of those guys acted as though they were actually having fun out there, playing human tackling dummies for the other squads.

Well, I told myself, I wasn't going to be a third-string man any more than I was going to be a Milligan. I'd go through the motions in this practice and then they could look for another third-string end, the next day. I could even

transfer to another school where they might appreciate a man who knew how to play football, even though getting into any school those days was something to go through.

I turned away, with my third team misfit pals, and as I did, I saw Hacky Hoffman looking at me. There was half a grin on his puss and I knew he was waiting for me to blow up, waiting for me to flap my lip, so he could tell everybody I couldn't take it, that I dogged it when the going got rough.

Okay, I told myself, he could have the laugh, if it gave him any satisfaction. For all I knew, Hacky Hoffman was responsible for me dropping onto the third team. Hacky carried a lot of weight with Gook Crane—and Gook certainly had the ear of Old Man Long.

BUT I kicked that thought away before it got settled. I knew better than to think that Old Man Long would listen to anybody, even his team captain, about giving a man a bum break deliberately. And I knew, too, that Gook wouldn't try to pull anything like that and—well, I was honest with myself to the extent of admitting, inside, that Hacky Hoffman wouldn't go to Gook or anybody else with such a deal.

No, it had been Kilborn, Edward J., who had flopped, somehow. I kept my head down as I trotted off, because nobody likes to find out that instead of the hot shot he thought himself to be, he really was a pretty dismal Joe.

We had a quarterback named Horn, working for the third team. He was a senior and pretty good, too, but he had the bad luck to be playing at the same time that Miller Kyle and Joe Walters, who had cinched the first and second teams' quarter spots, and he couldn't

have overtaken either of those two guys in a million years.

To listen to him, though, you'd never think that he was at all disappointed about missing out again. He was as full of the old magoo as a first-string quarter pepping up the team for the Stanning game.

"Come on, guys," he yipped. "Make it good from the first play. We've got plenty of places to climb to, and the ones at the top haven't got any place to go except down."

I tried not to sneer as I slipped into my place in line, with Williams on the opposite end. Whatever consolation there was to the fact that Williams, who had beaten me out of a first string berth on the frosh team, was on the third squad now, wasn't enough to take the sting of my disappointment away.

We ran through some simple signals and then Old Man Long told us to square away against the Milligans.

"Straight line plays," he told Horn, "but I want you all to dig."

I'll dig all right, I told myself—I'll dig right on out of here, as soon as this practice session is over.

The Milligans were left-footing it around, whooping it up and slapping each other on the back like the bunch of big never-would-be's they were. We huddled and Horn called for one of our backs to take it off tackle. The man opposite me was some big farmer who probably never had played football in his life before coming to Blairden. I checked him out of play when he tried to come in and then slanted out to pick up the defensive back who was coming at the tackle slant. I hit him hard, in the middle, and he folded up with a grunt.

That was one, I said silently, to show

[Turn page]



TOPS FOR QUALITY

BIGGER AND BETTER



anybody who might be looking that I knew how to play offensive end. Not that it made any difference if anybody did see me, because Kilborn, Edward J., was through. No shoving around and getting shoved on the third squad for Mrs. Kilborn's little boy.

"Nice blocking, Ed," Horn said, in the huddle. "Willie, you gotta get started faster. Smitty watch your offside."

Sure, sure, I said wearily, to myself. Do some nice blocking and get started faster and watch your offside. Do everything just perfect and some day you'll have the chance to sit on the bench and watch punks who aren't good enough to carry your helmet play the game out there on the field while you sit on the bench and wait for the coach's eye that never looks your way.

Horn sent the tailback into center and I didn't have much to do on the next play. Then our quarterback tried a slant at my end.

I went out with the play, letting the ball carrier's blockers take care of my tackle, and went for the Milligan end. I got him, too, but it was a sloppy piece of blocking, if I do admit it myself. He went over to my side and outside me, and while I went down in the grass, he recovered enough to make the tackle.

"Pee-yew, Ed!" Horn said. "What happened to you on that play?"

"I slipped," I said, and maybe I had slipped, for all I knew. "I can't get 'em all."

"Get this one, then," Horn said. "Same play, same place."

We went back to our positions and I squatted, wondering just why I was even making an effort. The ball went back and I made for my end, a gawky kid who jiggled around, his big paws out, his eyes on the ball that was coming at him.

I WENT for him and this time I really did slip. I started my block too soon, maybe, but my driving foot skidded on a slick place and I was on the ground before my shoulder came anywhere near its target.

"Terrible!" I heard somebody bellow, and when I looked up, there was Old Man Long with his hands on his hips, glaring at me. "Where have you been all season, number Hundred-and-eight? Whoever told you to throw a block when you were halfway down the field from the man you're trying to take out? Dig

into him, man! Put your shoulder in his middle and shove him right back to his own goal line. Keep driving till you hear the whistle or he's flat on his back."

I started to explain how I'd slipped, and then I remembered that I'd told Horn that I'd slipped on the last one, so I kept my mouth shut. Instead of saying anything, I looked down at the ground and took what Old Man Long had to give, which was plenty.

And that, I told myself, was just my luck. When I'd made that first check, the one that had put two men out of play, Old Man Long had been looking somewhere else, probably at Thomasini doing his stolid, workmanlike job. But let Kilborn fluff one and there was the Coach, right on top of him, his eyes glued on him, instead of on the first team where the Head Coach's eyes belonged, anyway.

"Okay, guys," Horn was calling. "Let's go."

It was a punt and I knew Old Man Long was watching me that time, so I went down the field like a streak, after feinting at the tackle to make him hesitate on the run-in. I kept my eyes on the Milligan safety man and saw him go over to his right, so I followed him down. I was way ahead of Williams, on my man just as the ball came down in his arms.

But I'd been pressing. I'd made the whole distance all-out, and when I was on the Milligan safety man, I was going too fast to check myself for the tackle. He ducked and I went sailing by and skidded into the turf about three yards past him, and that was that. By the time I recovered, Williams had the ball-carrier down.

"No, no, *NO!*" Old Man Long was shouting. "Number Hundred-and-eight, you didn't have the ball! You weren't running for a touchdown! You were supposed to be after the safety man, not doing a hundred yard dash! Next time, give us a little less speed down the field and a little more tackling when you get down there."

CHAPTER IV

A Betting Man

OH, what was the use? I'd been playing ball, prep and frosh, for years

and I'd never overrun a punt receiver in my life until that afternoon, and it had had to happen while Old Man Long had his eagle eyes on me, when I had been trying to make up for the two sloppy blocks I had made on those end sweeps, when I had tried to show the coach that those two fluffs had been a mistake. And now I sure looked like third-string material, or Milligan material, and after all the hard work I'd put in at training that season.

After that, I was gruesome. The Milligans had the ball on their thirty-five, or thereabouts, and their first haphazard play came in my direction. I went in a couple of paces and waited for them to come at me, and when they arrived, I forgot about everything I'd ever learned about football. I was a sucker for the clumsiest block ever thrown at me and I went down, and the Milligans roared over me like a Notre Dame first-string backfield playing the West End Little Scorpions.

When I got up from that one and dared risk a glance at Old Man Long, he was walking up the field toward the place where the first and second string teams were scrimmaging. And he was shaking his head, slowly and hopelessly.

I played out the rest of the scrimmage, but I got progressively worse. I knew there wasn't any use in making the old college try any longer. Every time Old Man Long had put his eyes on me in action I'd been rotten and he was convinced now that if he'd made a mistake in putting me on the third squad it was because I belonged on the Milligans.

Later, after practice, I took off my shoes and stowed them in my locker more carefully than usual, not hurrying, because I was past caring whether there was any hot water in the showers or not. When that locker door slammed, I told myself, it would be for the last time, as far as Kilborn, Edward J., was concerned. It would be into the shower and into street clothes and out the door forever and they could keep the varsity number I was going to get in that dizzy ceremony, I didn't care.

There was the clack of cleats on the floor beside me and I turned to see Thomasini standing there.

"Come to gloat?" I asked him, in my nastiest voice.

"You know better than that, Ed," the dark-haired man said. "I don't do so

well in the gloating department. I just dropped by to say I'm sorry you're not on the other end of the line, even if a fraternity brother, Hollingwood, did make the team."

"You can save your breath," I said rudely. "Did Hacky Hoffman send you here to rub it in, by any chance?"

"I told you why I came," he said quietly. "I always thought you had more stuff than I ever would have, and I still say it."

"And I'll say it, too," I said recklessly. "I had some bad luck out there today, and I'll admit I looked bad. But I'm not so awful that I can't play rings around you and Hollingwood and Terry and this clinker, Kling, any day in the week."

I guess my voice went up higher than I had intended it to, because the jabber of the locker room stopped as though somebody had turned off a faucet, and everybody was looking at me.

"Take it easy, Ed," Thomasini was saying. "There's plenty of time to prove it. Heck, man, the season hasn't opened yet."

I started to tell this earnest young man that it was finished, as far as I was concerned, when I saw Hacky bearing down on me, looking sore. He got close to me and spoke in a low voice.

"You darned fool," he said. "Are you deliberately trying to give the fraternity a black eye, flapping your lip like this? If you're a sorehead, if you can't take it, like I've always said you couldn't, at least save your griping till you get back to the house."

I started to blare something at Hacky when there was another interruption. The locker room door opened and Blimp Jordan waddled in, his arms full of football gear and his face beaming over the mound of equipment.

"Hi, you guys," he yelled from the door. "Meet Blairden's new star guard."

A HOWL of welcome greeted him from the men on the benches and those who had frozen at their lockers, waiting for the outcome of the tangle between Hacky and me. Blimp always had been one of the most popular men on the campus and if a lot of fellows had laughed at him and his size, it always had been friendly laughter and not mean ridicule.

"Where'd they get the uniform, Ringling Brothers?" somebody yelled.

"Don't fall on me when you collapse, Blimp."

"Lord help the training table from now on."

"Gentlemen, I give you Old Man Long and his performing elephant!"

Stuff like that pelted Blimp from all sides of the room and the fat boy took it, grinning, looking happier than I'd ever seen him in his life. He lumbered over to a vacant locker and let his stuff cascade to the floor.

"Yup," he said, as cheery as a goat with a tin can, "I finally did it, dropped enough pounds so the doc says I can go out for football. 'Course, I'm way behind on the fundamentals, but Coach says he'll give me special work-outs. Thank heavens a guard doesn't have to know too much about stuff, anyway."

There was a chorus of voices from the men around him, promising Blimp help if he needed it, giving him pats on the back for having made the dieting grade, predicting that he'd make the greatest guard ever to wear a Red B. The big lug ate it up, his grin getting wider with every crack they made about him.

I turned back to my locker. For some reason, I felt pretty lonesome standing there, stowing away the rest of my gear. Everybody was for Blimp Jordan and nobody was for Ed Kilborn. Blimp was a joke and I was—had been—one of the best end prospects ever to come to Blairden, and now I was out in the cold and this hippo, whom I'd had to practically blackmail into shedding enough pounds to be allowed to even try out for the team, was being treated like a hero.

I slammed the door of my locker shut and twirled the combination dial, not that locker combinations meant anything, all of them opening with anything more than a baby's tug. I waited awhile, watching the gang make over Blimp Jordan, and then I walked back to the house.

I lay on my bed for a while, looking up at the ceiling and wondering just how I was going to break the news to my father that I'd quit the team—that I'd flunked out, rather. It was going to be a hard letter to write and make sound convincing. Unless I wanted to tell an outright lie and say I'd been injured—and he could check up on that quickly enough—I'd have to really strain myself to find an excuse that would hold water.

My father was no dummy, and he'd had practice with my excuses before. He hadn't taken it any too well the year before, when he'd found out that I was second team frosh, after I'd sort of led him to believe that I was holding down a first team job, and for him to find out I was third team now was going to start fireworks.

I got up off the bed and went to my desk over in the corner of the room. I pulled out a sheet of notepaper and sat down to gnaw at the end of my fountain pen.

The Coach down on me? Naw, I'd pulled that last year and it had gotten a sour reception. Back in my studies? Well, I could fluff a couple of exams and maybe make that work, but my marks always had been up there in school, without much effort on my part, and it might look fishy for me to suddenly develop an acute case of dumbness, right after I failed to get up there for the first squad.

I started writing and once I got started, it came easily—almost too easily.

"I might as well admit it," I wrote. "I'm not half as hot as I've always led myself to believe. I worked as hard as I could during training, anybody will tell you that if you want to check, and I really thought I had a good chance for the first team. To tell the truth, I thought I was in like a swinging door."

"So today, Old Man Long read off the teams and I didn't make the first squad. I didn't even make the second. I was dropped to the third and from the performance I staged this afternoon, it looks like I'll be on the Milligans tomorrow. Or would be, if I stuck around."

"But I know that you and Jed, with your good records at Blairden, wouldn't want a Kilborn staggering around on the Milligans or the third team, balling things up in general, so I'm turning in my suit. I know this will be a disappointment to you, but I can honestly say I tried my best and I just wasn't good enough."

"I hope you and Mother and—"

I COVERED the letter up with an arm as the door crashed open and Blimp Jordan came in, still beaming. He heaved himself across the room and crashed a hand down on my back.

"Where were you, fella?" he asked. "Where were you during the reception

at the locker room? The big welcome for Blimp Jordan, pride of the Blairden line?"

"I was there," I said, with a grin I managed to dredge up from somewhere. "I saw the whole show. Congratulations, guy."

"We thank you," Blimp said solemnly. "We can only say that all we are—all we ever hope to be—we owe to you, my fine, feathered friend."

He turned serious without warning.

"And I'm not kidding," he said earnestly. "It was you who put the convincer to me, after that bum Hoffman blackjacked me into going into this thing. If it hadn't been for you, I'd have said to heck with my father and Hacky Hoffman and I'd never have gone to the gym that morning. After all, Hacky couldn't have *horse-whipped* me, if I hadn't! It was you who kept giving me the old shot in the arm whenever I weakened in the dieting department. It was you who took away those candy bars I smuggled in here one night. I owe you a lot, Ed."

I looked the other way.

"Don't be a dope," I said. "You did it yourself. Besides, wait'll Old Man Long and his merry men get you sweating out on that field. You'll probably curse the day you ever listened to anything I might have said. It's a long hard grind and—well, I don't think it's worth it, in the end."

I knew Blimp was staring at me from out of his round blue eyes, but I didn't raise mine to meet his stare.

"Worth it!" he said, in a shocked voice. "Why, man, you've said yourself that it might have sounded corny, but you knew that one of the biggest thrills you'd ever get in your life would be the one you'd get when they handed you your permanent number."

"I said a lot of things," I muttered. "You listen to Wise Man Kilborn and you'll wind up in the nut hatch."

There was a little silence and then the squeak of springs as the fat man dropped to the bed beside the desk.

"What's the trouble, Ed?" Blimp asked, in a quiet voice.

"No trouble," I said. "Just a little fed up with football, that's all. Fed up before the season starts, tired out, sick of the whole business."

I guess maybe I got a little wild then, and my voice started to go up.

"Sick of working like a dog and then having them look the other way when the time comes to hand out places on the only team that counts, the first team," I told Blimp. "Sick of having Hacky Hoffman laugh at me, when his predictions come true. Sick of thinking I'm a big shot on the gridiron until somebody slaps me in the face with the fact that I'm a complete bust. Sick of it all!"

I still couldn't look at Blimp because I was afraid that if I did, I'd start bawling like a cry-baby. I kept my eyes on my hands that still covered the letter I was writing to my father and somehow my vision blurred as I looked at my knuckles.

"I think I get it," Blimp said slowly. "You didn't make the first team, after all."

"I didn't make the second, either," I blurted. "I was stuck in the third, and tomorrow I'll probably be on the Milligans. Only tomorrow I won't be there. They can get somebody else to play stumblebum for the squad. I'm through."

"Wait a minute," Blimp said slowly. "You can't quit, Ed."

"Can't quit?" I asked. "Just why can't I?"

A SECOND'S silence, and then Blimp said in a measured voice:

"I'll tell you why, Ed, even though I didn't mean to. Some time ago, when I first started this dieting racket, I made a couple of bets. They mean a lot to me, those bets, and you know I'm—pretty well healed."

"My first bet was that I'd lose enough weight to have the doc okay me for at least a try-out with the football team. Well, I won that bet today."

"My next bet was that I'd at least make the Milligans and, believe me, I'm going to work plenty hard to win that one, too, because I—well, I can't afford to lose it."

That one opened my eyes. If Blimp Jordan couldn't afford to lose the bet it must be a big one, I told myself, because I had, on occasion, seen him drop a bundle without a flicker of his ready grin.

"And the third bet," Blimp went on, his voice gone strangely hard, "is the biggest of the three. My third bet was that you'd stick out the season, even if you were dropped to the Milligans. I made that bet because the guy I was

betting said you'd dog it when the going got tough."

I looked at my roommate with startled eyes. "Hacky Hoffman!" I said.

CHAPTER V

Kilborn Was There

HE NODDED and, somehow, his rosebud mouth was a thin line.

"But he told me he didn't bet!" I protested. "That night we tangled here in the room, the night he threatened you with a letter to your father, he turned down a bet I offered."

Blimp shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know about that," he said, "but I know he bet with me, later. And they're the biggest bets I ever made in my life."

I thought it over, as soon as my brain cleared enough for me to think straight. Hacky Hoffman was probably the richest guy in Blairden, certainly the fraternity, next to Blimp. It could be possible that he could wave a bundle of dough in Blimp's face and get a bet so big that my roommate would be worried about losing it. It would be out of character, but who ever said I was a good judge of character?

"Wait a minute," I said. "If Hacky's got so much dough riding on my quitting the squad, couldn't he—"

"Act your age," Blimp said, quietly. "Behave, before I slap you over."

I subsided, knowing what Blimp had said when he had interrupted me was true. I might despise the guy, but Hacky Hoffman would never put me through the grinder to win a bet, even if he could.

"Now, Junior," Blimp said, in the mocking voice he generally used, "you'll recite after me: I'm not going to quit because I'd lose little Blimp's bet."

Well, what could I do? This big boy, this fellow sitting on my bed, had been a good friend of mine, probably the only real friend I had at Blairden.

He'd sunk a wad on my sticking with the team and I was about ready to lose it for him. He'd gone through the tortures of dieting, in the early days of his reducing program, because I'd argued him into it, and I'd argued him into it because I'd been afraid he wouldn't be

getting his weekly checks and my loan account would be cut off. I'd been a selfish heel, really, but I couldn't be heel enough to let him down now.

I picked up my half-finished letter and ripped it across the middle, folded the pieces together, and ripped it again. I dropped the scraps in the wastepaper basket. "Okay, Blimp," I said. "I'll win your bet for you. But hereafter don't go betting on Kilborn."

"He's a good bet," Blimp said comfortably. "He always will be. And thanks, fella."

"Don't mention it," I said wryly, "and do they wear dinner jackets to the Milligan dinner, at the end of the season?"

It was as I thought it would be the next day, when I got to the locker room. Old Man Long had posted lists of the practice squads, based on the first day's workouts. There weren't many changes, but there was one that interested me.

The Milligans' new left end was a man named Kilborn, Edward J.

I swallowed that tasty pill and climbed into my uniform, trying not to let the other guys in the locker room see how I really felt. I was nearly dressed when Hacky Hoffman came over.

"I'll tell you the truth, Ed," he said, "I didn't expect to see you here today."

I forced a grin to my face as I looked up at the big tackle.

"Thought you'd won your bet, huh?"

I asked. "It must gripe you to know I'm over the hump now, and you're bound to lose."

"Oh, the bet," he said, carefully. "Blimp did tell you about the bet, then?"

"Yeah," I said, "and I'm going to get a great kick out of watching you hand over that dough to him."

"Remember," he said, with a sort of smile, "you haven't finished the season yet. Maybe a few days on the Milligans will finish you off."

"Double your bet, kid," I told Hoffman. "Blimp will be glad to cover it."

"I might do that," he said slowly, "if I can rake up the dough. I'm still not sold on you, Kilborn."

THAT was all I needed. I went out with my misfit team mates and slugged it out with the third team all day, then moved over to let the first squad rip some holes in us, practicing a delayed spinner play, and wound up acting as a punching bag for the second

team, composed of eager beavers who were so near and yet so far to the Big B squad that they were especially anxious to show Old Man Long they belonged one notch higher.

I finally dragged my weary bones into the locker room and dropped to the bench. No wonder, I thought, the Milligans threw themselves a banquet at the end of the season. They were due some sort of a celebration for coming through alive.

All the time I had been bouncing around the hard ground, Blimp had been working out on another part of the field, going through the fundamentals we'd all sweated through weeks before. It was true that Blairden needed a good guard and needed him bad, to coin a phrase, and I figured that the coach thought it worthwhile to give Blimp his own special instructor for a streamlined course in how to grunt and groan in the heavy spot.

Blimp was big and, since he'd dropped all that suet, his wind was coming back. He was about as fast as a stalled truck, but Old Man Long apparently was willing to sacrifice some speed for a solid block in a defensive line.

When Blimp came in, he flopped down on the bench beside me and moaned.

"Oh Death," he murmured, "where is thy sting? You guys on the squads at least get some rest in the huddles, but that coach I've got never heard of a five-minute break."

"As for me," I said bitterly, "I've had a charming day, playing a new game entitled: Let's Step On Kilborn's Fate."

He looked at me and I looked at him and we both broke out laughing, for no reason at all. I guess it was because we were both so dog tired that we were silly. Anyway, we sat there and laughed till the tears ran down our cheeks and the other guys in the locker room grinned as they looked at us. When Blimp caught his breath he waved a big arm.

"Gents," he announced, "you see here two examples of how the noble game of football builds sound minds in sound bodies, develops the muscles, hardens the arteries—I mean, head—and otherwise improves, enhances and beautifies the physique."

I got plenty of that beauty treatment, the next few days. There were plenty of times when I wanted to take off my headgear, throw it straight at Old Man

Long's bald dome and walk off the field, never to put on a pair of shoes with cleats in them again in my life. But every time the urge got almost too much to resist, I remembered Blimp's bet with Hacky Hoffman and I went through the tooth-gritting routine again, bowed my head and let them come at me.

They weren't trampling me as badly as they had, at that, and I was giving them back a little more than I'd been able to, at the start.

I was getting wary, with a caution born of too many blocks that left me stretched on the turf gasping for breath, and now, when I went in on a first team and sweep, I tried to play it so that I could duck at least the first blocker and maybe the second. Once or twice, in fact, I actually got in on the ball-carrier and it was a soul-satisfying experience to wrap my arms around him and send him down on the underneath side, for a change.

Blimp labored his way up to a spot at guard on the Milligans and he turned out to be an all-right man for the job. The first squad found that out about the third time they aimed one at him and he piled it up with a four-yard loss, rooting underneath the first team's line and crashing into the ball-carrier with a gay abandon that knocked Bill Gross, the wingback, out cold and gave Old Man Long and the trainers some anxious moments. And that had been through Gook Crane, the captain, at that.

So, the next day, Blimp Jordan moved up to the third team. That sparkling end, Kilborn, Edward J., stayed where he was, with the Milligans.

"Darn it," Blimp complained, that night, "I have more fun playing on the same team with you, Ed. They should have left me on the Milligans. I won my second bet from Hacky, anyway."

"Maybe," I said, "I ought to work my way up to the third squad. Maybe you're my inspiration."

"Sure," Blimp grinned. "Hitch your wagon to a blimp. Joke."

LAUGHED then, but I wondered, a couple of days later, if there was quite as much joke attached to the set-up as Blimp thought. Maybe it was because I worked better, with my big, fat friend down the line, than I did without him. Whatever the reason, I found myself missing Blimp and his constant chatter.

I made more tackles against the first squad after Blimp left than I had before, and I really think it was because I wanted to make the third to get back on the line with my roommate.

So, a few days later, I went up to third string, back where I started.

We opened the season against Wiggins, in what was to have been a push-over but wasn't. We third-stringers had hoped to see action against Wiggins, but when the half ended and the score remained a big double-zero, we knew we didn't have much chance.

Blairden finally got rolling in the third period and scored two fast touchdowns, but Wiggins had a razzle-dazzle aerial attack, remarkably developed for that stage of the season, and Old Man Long played it carefully. He made a few suggestions, but there was no wholesale in-and-out business as there would have been with the lop-sided score we had expected.

Toward the middle of the final quarter, Old Man Long waggled his finger at Blimp and my roommate heaved himself off the bench. There was a light shining in his round face as he pulled on his headgear and began lumbering up and down the sideline for his warmup. The stands recognized him, of course, and the cheer that went up made the referee look toward the sidelines, probably wondering if a twelfth Blairden man had gotten into the game somehow and was scoring a touchdown all by himself.

"Go get 'em, kid," I yelled at him, as Old Man Long patted him on the back and sent him thundering out onto the field.

I meant it, too. Kilborn, the great end, might be huddled in a parka at a place that would be reserved for him all season, but it still gave me a warm feeling inside to see that big mug go out there and realize a dream that must have been with him all the time, underneath his fat and his scoffing.

Blimp didn't do anything spectacular during the remaining minutes of the game, but neither did Wiggins do anything to him. They tried a smash at him once and then decided there were less immovable objects at hand. He finished out the game and I was the guy that threw the blanket around his shoulders as he came off the field.

"How was I, Ed?" he panted. "Gosh, wait'll my old man hears about *this*!"

"You were swell, Blimp," I told him. "Looks like you're going up again."

I was right, too. Blimp was moved up to the second team on Monday. On Wednesday, an end by the name of Kilborn went up to the second team, too.

Don't ask me to explain it. Perhaps there was some subconscious drive that told me that what a man who had been a useless hunk of blubber a few weeks before could do, I could do. Or maybe it was Blimp's after-practice bull sessions, his urging me to come along and get on the line with him, that did it. Anyway, when Blimp moved, I followed.

I got in next week's game, all right. We met Breckenridge and it was a rough piece of business from the opening whistle. Breckenridge had a heavy squad and they relied entirely on power. I won't say there was any actual dirty business going on in the line, but it wasn't long before red jerseys and green jerseys were stretched out on the grass like laundry left out to dry.

Hollingwood got his early, when the Breckenridge team, en masse, crashed into him. Terry got the call that time, but in the second quarter I got the nod from Old Man Long.

I felt like I'd felt the day in prep school when I was sent into my first varsity game. Pounding heart, dry throat, the fear that I wouldn't make good, the lust for battle with the other team—all the sensations were there. And, man, it felt good to crouch in the huddle and listen to Miller Kyle rattle off the signals.

"Okay," Blimp yelled as we went back to the line. "Make it good!"

WE MADE it good, all right. Duke Gillespie, a sub back and a fraternity brother, at that, found his hole, between me and the tackle. I lucked out of my first block and managed to get downfield to spill a Breckenridge secondary defense man. When I got up, Duke was crossing the double white lines, standing up.

"Yah-whoo!" Blimp bellowed, as he lumbered up to join us. "What a line! What a right side of a line!"

It was then that I got a shock in the realization that if a lineup had been made right at that moment, it would have had, for the right side of the Blairden line: Jordan, guard; Hackett, tackle; Kilborn, end. The three of us, the trio

who had been involved in our little drama, playing side-by-side and paving the way for Duke Gillespie's score.

I looked at Blimp and grinned. And then I looked at Hackett and grinned. And he grinned right back at me.

He was grinning, too, on Numbers Day, the afternoon of the ceremony I was talking about awhile back. He grinned as he stood there, one of the line of last season's regulars, and shook my hand while I clutched my new precious jersey, with its bright, new "23."

"Okay, Ed," he said. "You made it. Congratulations."

"Even if it costs you dough?" I asked, grinning.

"I think I can afford paying off to Blimp," he said, smiling.

Behind me, Blimp Jordan guffawed.

"Pay me now, Hacky," he demanded.

"Pay me now! You might run out of

town, for all I know."

Hacky Hoffman reached into his pocket and pulled out a dime. He gave it to Jordan who kissed it tenderly and tucked it in a pocket of his new-sized vest.

"That, I keep forever," he announced. "The biggest bet I ever made in my life, as far as wanting to win it goes. The nickel for cutting my weight down was a big one, the nickel for making the Milligans was bigger, but this one—the dime that kept my boy in there till he proved he had it, like I knew all along—that's the biggest bet I ever made, or ever will make."

I guess he was right. I know that the bet meant an awful lot to me. More, even, than that lucky pass I caught to go over for the only score in the Stanning game that year.

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**UNION MADE
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Soccer Screwball

By H. C. BUTLER

This Ernie Entwistle could be a clown or he could be a goalie—but could he ever be both at the same time?

THE world is full of screwballs. You find them in all walks of life. Some become radio comedians and others go into politics. And a few even play soccer—like this Ernie Entwistle.

I will never forget how this Entwistle boob latches onto our club. We—meaning Coach Sam Dugan and myself—are standing on the sidelines watching our minions kick the ball around in a pre-season practice game. Considering the fact that soccer is a team game and that it takes time for a team of

eleven men to learn to work together, I figure the boys look fairly good. But Dugan does not share my viewpoint.

To begin with, Dugan has a sour puss that, even in its sweetest moments, looks like a gallon of curdled cream. He has steely gray eyes, a thick nose, and a mouth that turns down at the corners out of habit. He is noted around soccer circles as a conservative and a pessimist—and right now the latter is giving him a run for his money.

"Ernie Entwistle!" he snorts, his



The big ape is superb—nothing gets past him

shrubbery eyebrows crashing together over his wide nose. "How can a guy with a name like that play soccer?"

It is a good question—except that I have never heard tell of this Ernie Entwhistle before. So I ask him, politely, is he holding back any secrets?

Dugan doesn't answer. Instead, he sticks one gnarled paw in his pocket and pulls out a telegram. He hands it to me with a gesture that indicates all is not well in Denmark. I find out it reads like this:

AM SENDING YOU GOALKEEPER ERNIE ENTWHISTLE STOP HE IS MOST SENSATIONAL GOALIE IN SOCCER STOP HE WILL ARRIVE AT FIELD FRIDAY STOP CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR GOOD LUCK.

THADDEUS P BRIGHTMYER

WELL, when I behold this missive I do not blame Dugan for feeling as low as a snake in a rut. Thaddeus P. Brightmyer is the owner of the Ranger Pro Soccer Club. This in itself is not too bad, but the fact is that Brightmyer travels a lot and fancies himself as an ivory hunter—which is the thing that causes Dugan to chew up so many aspirins.

"That monkey doesn't know a soccer player from an Eskimo piano tuner!" says Dugan scathingly. "He is always sending us stars that turn out to be flops. First it is Izzie Throckmyer, who is so awkward he falls over his own dogs. Then it is Pokey Ray, who cannot head a ball because he has no forehead. Now it is a star goalie named Ernie Entwhistle!"

"We need a good goalie bad," I put in, hopeful-sorta.

"Sure, sure!" snarls Dugan. "We have everything except a good goalie. And whether or not we get one will decide whether we win the title this year. But Ernie Entwhistle! I never heard of the guy!"

"Then I reckon as how we better get acquainted," says a voice behind us, and both Dugan and I jump like somebody has nudged us in the south end with one of them English darts.

Well, to tell the truth, there are times when I wish I had a vocabulary. Because if I was able to toss in all the worst words in the dictionary, it would only partly describe this goof who looks down on us.

That's it, looks down on us! From way up thar. He is seven feet tall if he's an inch, and what goes into making up that seven feet is something to write home to mother about—if you want to scare the liver out of mother.

Taking inventory from the top down, I see he has a face. It is not much of a face, consisting mostly of two black marble eyes surrounded by a blank look. He has a pair of hearing flaps on each side of his noggin, and his nose and mouth look like they have been placed in position by somebody who didn't have his mind on his work.

Hanging from a pair of King-Kongish shoulders are two long dangling arms that reach clear to his bowed knees. The rest of his body is simply bulk. He must weigh two hundred and fifty pounds just as he is—dressed in a pair of cowboy pants, a white silk shirt, and a ten-gallon Stetson hat!

Well, Dugan stares at this cowboy creature for some time before he finally finds his voice.

"Are—you—Entwhistle?" he asks, sorta awed.

Something opens up in the character's face, and all at once I realize it is his mouth. What he is doing, I decide, is smiling.

"That's me, partner. Ernie Entwhistle, best goalie in soccer. I hail from Texas, where we got the best of everything!" The guy's voice has the delicate sound of a cement-mixer.

I see Dugan's bushy eyebrows skid together in a frown again. Then he reaches out his hand to shake Entwhistle's huge paw.

Well, if I don't see it happen with my own eyes I wouldn't believe it. But just as Dugan grabs this Entwhistle's hand there is a snapping sound and Dugan jumps back like he has been shot.

"What in blazes—!" he gasps.

Entwhistle lets out a boom of laughter that almost shakes the stadium.

"Reckon I fooled ya that time, eh?" he says, very pleased with himself. "It's just a little trick I picked up. I got a tiny battery up my sleeve with two bare wires in the palm of my hand. Gives a critter quite a start when he shakes hands with me."

Dugan is a long time recovering. Like I say, he is a conservative man and takes his soccer seriously. And to have a goon like this around, well—

DUGAN counts to ten with his eyes closed while Entwhistle grins like a chimpanzee. When he finally opens his peepers again, he looks straight at me. There is great sadness in his homely face.

"A practical joker!" he croaks hoarsely. "Leave it to Brightmyer to send us a practical joker!"

He turns slowly, deliberately, and gives this Entwhistle the once-over twice.

"You're kinda tricky, aren't you?" he says sweetly. "And you play soccer too. That ought to be a fine combination!"

"Reckon it is," says Entwhistle simply.

Dugan nods. He is getting up one of his sarcastic moods, I can see.

"What kind of tricks do you pull on a soccer field?" he asks. "Do you have a special selection reserved for goal-keeping?"

Entwhistle's flat face opens in a grin again.

"Shucks—I ain't so tricky really," he says modestly. "But I'm a heck-raisin' hombre on a soccer field, so stick me in there."

Well, there is nothing to do but try him out. After all, we don't have a goalie that is worth his keep, and this Entwhistle is at least a possibility. Besides, Thaddeus P. Brightmyer owns the club and we can't very well refuse a try-out to a guy he thinks is a star, even if he is a poor picker.

So Dugan blasts on the whistle and calls the boys in to meet this soccer cowboy.

"This replica of the Eiffel Tower," says Dugan, "is Ernie Entwhistle. He comes from Texas and by his own admission he's the best goalie in soccer. We're giving him a tryout to see if he's overrating himself."

One thing I will say for Entwhistle—he is a good-natured egg. He just grins and takes Dugan's cracks in stride. And a few minutes later he trots out on the pitch to take his place in one of the goals.

Well, a little something about soccer goalies. Usually they are of average height, not too heavy, have quick reactions and are fast on their feet. The way this Entwhistle is built, he does not appear to have any of these basic qualifications. That is, until we see him play. Then we get a surprise.

Entwhistle has been placed on the scrub team, and our first team has been instructed to attack and keep attacking. As a result, poor Entwhistle is under fire continuously. But do our boys score any goals? They don't. This Entwhistle, for as big a man as he is, gets around like a gazelle!

Yes sir, it is a sight to even bring a glint of hope into Dugan's eyes. This Entwhistle is all over the goal, grabbing the ball and punting it out, falling down to block impossible shots, fisting high kicks over the crossbar in volleyball fashion. There is just no getting the leather by this guy at all!

After about ten minutes of this, I see Dugan looking at me in amazement.

"I can't believe it," he snorts.

"The guy is good," I tell him simply.

Well, we stand around for about ten more minutes, while this Entwhistle makes one sensational save after another. And just about the time he has convinced us that he is some shakes as a goalie, he does the one thing in the world that is sure to queer him with Dugan.

He has just punted the ball clear into the next county after making a nice running pickup, and half the first team is chasing it to bring it back. And during the lull, this Entwhistle decides to put on a show of his own.

Before you can say antidisestablishmentarianism, this Entwhistle has a deck of cards in his hands. And with those huge paws of his, he starts to put on some sleight-of-hand shenanigans that really opens our eyes.

You know, routine stuff with magicians—making cards disappear, and the like. But the amazing part of it is that Entwhistle is a real expert at the business and dazzles everybody on the field with his nimble skill.

Everybody but Dugan. The only effect it has on Dugan is to make his face turn purple with rage.

Like I say, Dugan takes his soccer seriously. He lives it, breathes it, eats it and sleeps it. Outside of soccer, there is no world for him. Moreover, he has always been a conservative manager. He stresses conservative, methodical play, and drills the daylights out of the boys on fundamentals. And to his mind, clowning on a soccer field is about the last word in improper protocol.

I see Dugan's bushy eyebrows nudge each other to form a threatening line

over his beak. Then he blows on the whistle.

When the play on the field stops he dismisses the team with a gesture. But he calls Entwhistle over for a talk.

A LONGSIDE of this Entwhistle, Dugan looks like a midget. But this does not discourage him. He proceeds to give Entwhistle a rough going over.

"Look here, you Texas longhorn!" he howls. "There are a few things you gotta learn. You are maybe a good soccer player. And maybe we can use you. But remember this—you're in big-time soccer now. It's a business, and a rugged one. There's no time for such foolishness as doing card tricks on the field. You understand?"

Well, this Entwhistle looks very put out. He gets an almost childish pout on his big flat face.

"Shucks, Mr. Dugan—I was just havin' a spell of fun with the boys," he rumbles.

"Have your fun someplace else!" snaps Dugan angrily. "You don't have to be the life of the party around here, because this ain't no party. It's serious soccer. And no matter how good you are, you've got to play the game for keeps if you want to stick around."

Well, as things turn out, talking to Entwhistle goes in one ear and out the other, probably for the usual reason. We have several more practice sessions before the opener with the Hawks, and in each one Entwhistle cannot resist the temptation to "have a spell of fun with the boys."

As for the players, they openly get a kick out of Entwhistle's shenanigans. They like the guy because he is always good for a few laughs. But Dugan is worried because he thinks this Entwhistle will pull the stuff in a regular league game and disrupt the whole team at a crucial moment. Which, of course, is possible.

Naturally, it is quite a problem for Dugan to decide whether or not to start Entwhistle in the opener against the high-scoring Hawks, because after all he is a whiz-bang of a goalie if he will only keep his mind on his work. Besides, we have only one other goalkeeper, and he should be keeping something else. Soccer balls go through him like water through a sieve.

Finally, Dugan decides to take a chance. He calls Entwhistle over before

the game and gives him an earful of advice.

"You're starting the game," he says bluntly. "I want you to go out there and play a good solid game of soccer. Keep your mind on the game, take it serious—and above all, cut the comedy. You get what I mean?"

Entwhistle nods his mammoth head, and his ears flap back and forth.

"Them hombres will be lucky to score off'n me," he says, very sober-like.

Well, just before game time, when the boys are already out on the field, we get a surprise. It is an unpleasant surprise as far as Dugan is concerned, and I am not overwhelmed with delight either. For who should swoop down on our bench but a roly-poly gent with bright blue eyes, apple-red cheeks and a bald head, named Thaddeus P. Brightmyer.

He is quite a boy, this Brightmyer. He looks like something that has just escaped from a Humpty-Dumpty nursery rhyme, but for all that he is a very pompous gink. If you could open a dictionary and let all the words tumble out in a heap, you would have a reasonable facsimile of the way Brightmyer talks. He never uses a short word when he can think of a long one.

"Good day, gentlemen, a bounteous good day!" he greets us, flowery-like. "I just arrived in this bustling metropolis a half hour ago. I rushed out madly to witness today's tense battle!" He lets his china-blue eyes scan the field a minute, and then his global face lights up like a neon sign. "Ah! I observe you are employing the services of Ernie Entwhistle in the goal. Don't you think he's an outstanding prospect, Dugan?"

I gawk at Dugan. I know he is boiling like a four-minute egg, because he always does when Brightmyer starts his flowery lingo. But he keeps his reply civil.

"He's a good goalie," he snorts. "But there's one thing wrong with him. He's a screwball."

"A—a what, Mr. Dugan?"

"A screwball, first-class. A clown. He doesn't take the game serious enough."

Brightmyer purses his lips to form a round O and considers this a moment.

"Your criticism is perhaps justified," he decides, "although a bit exaggerated. Entwhistle is something of a showman, but I doubt if that will hamper his game."

"We'll see," is all Dugan says.

Well, luckily, Brightmyer meets some friends at just that time and retires to the stands to sit with them. And right then the game starts.

It turns out to be a speedy, well-handled game, considering it is the first of the season. Both teams are alert and fast, and handle the leather like they have a season's play behind them. And for the first ten minutes there is no score and only a few shots-on-goal.

Then our Rangers draw first blood. Kale, our center-forward, slips past the fullbacks and fakes a shot at the goal. But when the Hawk goalie comes over to stop the play, Kale kicks the ball to our inside-right, coming in at an angle. The inside-right drills it between the up-rights for the first point.

Dugan grunts and says, "About time."

It is only five minutes later that Kale does it again. Only this time, instead of passing to the inside-right, he takes the ball in himself with a tricky dribble and slams it past the goalie to make the score Rangers 2, Hawks 0.

IT IS then that the Hawks really take the offensive. They sweep down the field time after time, trying tricky plays to lure Entwhistle out of position. And they fire the ball at him from all angles.

But the big ape is superb. He is all over the goal mouth, like he is riding a bucking bronco. He traps balls by leaping on them, he catches them and punts them out. He fists them over the cross-bar, and even kicks them out of the goal on a dead run.

"What a guy!" I yap to Dugan. "You can't keep a man like that on the bench, even if he is a looney."

But Dugan just holds up his hand, and I see he has his fingers crossed.

Well, the half ends with our Rangers leading 2-0, and so far Entwhistle has pulled no stunt to anger Dugan. In the locker room, Dugan is downright cheerful.

"He's great," he gloats. "If he just keeps playing that way now, and forgets he's a nut, he'll make us a fine goalie."

These are very wise words. They are hopeful words. It is really too bad that as soon as the second half starts, Entwhistle dashes cold water all over everything.

It is mighty terrible, from Dugan's standpoint anyway. Hardly does this

Entwhistle take his place in the goal before he is putting on an act of his own. While the ball is being booted around in the middle of the pitch, this monkey suddenly goes berserk and puts on the sleight-of-hand act again!

Well, for a moment everybody is stunned. Then, all at once, a great roar of appreciation comes up from the crowd—so loud that it almost stops the play on the field. In fact, several of the Hawk players forget momentarily that they are in a soccer game, and stand around staring at this crazy galoot who is doing magic between the goal posts.

And then the referee blasts on his whistle!

The ref is a little red-faced man named Donovan who is now redder than he has ever been. He lights out for Entwhistle, and both Dugan and I follow with great dispatch. We arrive in time to see the ref waving a finger at Entwhistle.

"What are you trying to do—hold up the game?" he yowls.

Entwhistle just grins, all over his blank face.

"Shucks, no. Let the boys play. I ain't doin' nothin'."

Donovan swallows his Adam's apple with a gulp.

"You cut out the shenanigans," yelps the ref, "before I toss you out of the game!"

Entwhistle just shrugs.

"I reckon there ain't nothin' in the rule book says I can't amuse myself a bit while I got a spare moment," he says.

Well, this apparently baffles the ref. He just stands there, glaring helplessly. Finally Dugan takes a hand, and when he talks each word is like chipped ice.

"Put away those cards, Entwhistle," he says, "or I'll toss you out of the game!"

Well, the usual thing happens. This Entwhistle starts to pout like an overgrown kid, and he looks like he has just lost his best friend who owes him a hundred bucks. Finally, he puts the cards back in his pocket, giving Dugan a very chagrined look. This only makes Dugan madder, so he gives Entwhistle the works.

"One more screwy stunt like that and I'll not only yank you out of the game," he says levelly, "but I'll yank you off the club. Now get in there, you crazy clown, and play soccer like I know you can!"

Entwhistle shrugs a disgruntled shrug. "Okay, Dugan," he says morbidly. "If'n that's the way you want it."

FROM there on it is a sad affair. I shake my head yet when I think of it. It is horrible.

This Entwhistle does not play like Entwhistle any more. He plays like two other guys. He stands in the goal, stock-still, with a morose expression on his homely pan. He acts like he has just suffered a major tragedy, like his spirits have been dragged in the mud and trampled on.

And instead of having his mind on the game, it is just the opposite. He is in a daze.

With ten minutes of the second period gone, the Hawk inside-left fakes Entwhistle out of position and then drills a shot into the goal that even Little Lord Fauntleroy could have stopped. Dugan proceeds to tear out his hair, as it is a plain case of Entwhistle not paying attention to his business.

A few minutes later the Hawks tie up the game with a dead center kick that catches Entwhistle strolling around the goal like he is looking for four-leaf clovers. Even I could have stopped that one.

But it is the third goal that is really a crying shame. With the score knotted at 2-2, and a minute to go, the Hawks shoot the works. They manage to get the ball in close and the Hawk center-forward boots a lazy kick goalward.

In big-time soccer, no kick like that should ever go into a goal. It comes straight at Entwhistle on a nice easy bounce. All he has to do is hug the ball, then punt it out of danger.

But Entwhistle doesn't even see the ball! He is standing knee-deep in gloom, paying no attention—and the ball bounces off his arm and rolls merrily across the goal line!

So it's Hawks 3, Rangers 2 when the game ends a minute later!

Well, what Dugan says to Entwhistle in the locker room cannot be repeated in polite company. He laces him up, unlaces him, and then laces him down. And when he has finally exhausted himself, Entwhistle says:

"Shucks, Dugan—I reckon I just didn't feel much like playin' that second half."

Dugan holds himself tight a moment,

then clutches blindly at my arm.

"Take me out of here," he says hoarsely. "Take me out before I commit murder!"

I take him out—fast.

The pay-off comes in Thaddeus P. Brightmyer's office the next morning. We are sitting around discussing soccer in general, and I can see Dugan still has Entwhistle on his mind. Finally, Brightmyer unbends.

"About Ernie Entwhistle," he says cautiously. "Something will have to be done."

It is enough to get Dugan going. He erupts like one of them atom bombs.

"Something should be done, all right!" he raps. "And I know what it should be. Fire him!"

Brightmyer rewards this profound statement with a surprised look. His little round mouth shapes an O.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Dugan," he says, steeping his fingers, "that you don't thoroughly comprehend Entwhistle's complex nature—"

"I understand him!" Dugan bellows, and I can see he is as sore as a carbuncle on the tip of your nose. "He's a nut! And I have enough trouble putting a winning team together without playing nursemaid to an oversized screwball!"

Brightmyer's round face wrinkles in a frown. It is obvious he does not agree with Dugan at all.

"You're a fine coach, Mr. Dugan," he says slowly. "You know soccer from A to Z, and even from Z to A. But I'm afraid you're not well versed on the psychological approach necessary to the handling of eccentric personalities." He rocks back and forth in his swivel chair a moment, then goes on. "Entwhistle is an eccentric character. He needs special handling. Without it, he won't produce. With it, he'll develop into a topnotch soccer player."

"And what do we do in the meantime?" snorts Dugan. "Let him play solitary while a game's on? Lose games while he's being the life of the party? Look, Brightmyer—I'm trying to give you a winner this year. And I can't do it with a nut like Entwhistle around!"

Brightmyer just shrugs chunky shoulders.

"Allow me to have a few words with Entwhistle," he says. "I sincerely believe, with the proper psychological approach, I can bring him around."

"Okay," says Dugan, stomping out of the office. "As long as you don't bring him around me!"

Well, it is not the first time Brightmyer and Dugan have had words. Dugan simply goes back to drilling the Rangers, like he always has—this time with special emphasis on training a new man for goalkeeper.

ENTWHISTLE has his talk with Brightmyer, but we are not there when it happens. We notice, though, that when Entwhistle comes out of the interview he is in very jovial spirits. All of which makes Dugan a little more angry than he already is.

We have a week of practice before the important game with the Bluebirds. And a week is none too long, because the Bluebirds are a tough bunch of babies indeed. In fact, despite our fluke loss to the Hawks, we stand a good chance for the title if we can lick the Bluebirds, as they are logical contenders with us.

Anyway, the day of the big game arrives, clear and sunny and a little cool. In the locker room before game time Dugan gives the boys a pep talk and then reads off the starting lineup, and I notice that Entwhistle's name is conspicuously missing. And evidently somebody else notices it too—because hardly before Dugan finishes the lineup, Thaddeus P. Brightmyer is tugging us to one side.

"I observe," he says disappointedly, "that you failed to mention one Ernie Entwhistle."

"You observe right," says Dugan beligerently, as his eyebrows form a straight line over his schnozzle.

Brightmyer sighs and shakes his round head sadly.

"I'm sorry, Dugan," he says, "but I'm going to have to insist that you use Entwhistle in the goal today."

Dugan gets a blank look on his pan, not quite grasping it at first.

"You mean—"

"I mean that Entwhistle must play today. It's imperative."

Well, that is just about enough for Dugan. I see the color ride up his neck and his face turns a mottled purple.

"Now look here, Brightmyer," he says recklessly. "When I took the job of managing the Rangers, you said there'd be no front office interference."

Brightmyer nods his head, looking

slightly harassed.

"I know—and I repeat it. I ask that you make only this one exception. I believe Entwhistle will play a dazzling game today, if he's given the opportunity."

It is nip and tuck for awhile. Dugan fumes. He fusses. He yaps and he yowls. But Brightmyer insists. And finally Dugan throws up his hands.

"Okay, okay!" he growls. "So I'll put him in! And if we lose the championship on account of it, you can have my resignation!"

And he stalks off to tell Entwhistle he is playing after all. Brightmyer walks wearily away, and I notice his eyes are red-rimmed and he looks like he has been spending plenty of sleepless nights. Then I follow Dugan. I catch up to him just about the time he is giving Entwhistle a last-minute kick in the pants.

"You're getting one more chance today," he is saying. "One more chance! I want you to go out there, keep your mind on the game, and turn in a decent performance. And I'm warning you—if you pull one screwball stunt out there today you're through on this club. Is that plain?"

"As plain as a busted leg on a bronco," says Entwhistle, looking extremely gloomy.

Well, I guess Entwhistle gets the idea all right, because all during the first half he plays a very conservative brand of soccer. In fact, too conservative.

Almost from the beginning it is obvious that something is very rotten in Rumania. Entwhistle just doesn't seem to have any interest in the game. He stands in the goal mouth, looking lazy and lackadaisical, and on several occasions almost lets shots at the goal go through him that grade school kids should be able to stop. And finally, with ten minutes gone, the Bluebird outside-left nips the corner with a shot after pulling Entwhistle out of position.

It makes the score Bluebirds 1, Rangers 0.

Dugan squirms on the bench and faces Brightmyer, who has insisted on watching the game from the bench.

"He doesn't have his mind on it," Dugan rattles. "What do you think of your star now?"

Brightmyer shakes his global head.

"Something is radically wrong," he says vaguely.

APPARENTLY something is wrong, because at the fifteen-minute mark the Bluebirds score again. This time it's a straight dribble right down the center by the enemy center-forward, who smashes a shot past Entwistle after he makes a premature and ineffectual stab at the ball.

Dugan is a past master at rubbing fur the wrong way, so he turns on Brightmyer. "Most sensational goalie in soccer!" he yips. "What a laugh!"

Brightmyer's china-blue eyes glint as he looks at Dugan.

"What did you say to him before the game?" he asks sharply.

Dugan's face clouds.

"I told him this was his last chance," he says. "And if he doesn't cut the comedy and play a decent game he's all through."

Brightmyer claps his forehead with a chubby hand.

"That is the answer," he moans. "That did it!"

Then he gets a funny light in his eye as he leaps to his feet. He glares at Dugan.

"Leave him in, Dugan," he says. "No matter what happens, leave him in. I demand it." Then he bustles away into the crowd like he is going somewhere in a big hurry.

Dugan takes it out on me.

"Sure, I'll leave him in," he says grimly. "I'll leave the sap in if they score a hundred goals. Maybe that's the only way to teach Brightmyer that he doesn't know anything about soccer!"

Well, strangely enough, things go a little more favorably for the rest of the half. The Bluebirds manage to get very few shots-on-goal for the balance of the period, mainly because our fullbacks are playing over their heads in protecting Entwistle and his goal.

And at the same time the Rangers come up with a dazzling offensive that knots the score at 2-all. A minute before the half ends, our inside-right slips a neat shot into the corner to make the score Rangers 3, Bluebirds 2 as the half ends.

Now, you would think that this bit of good fortune would mellow Dugan a bit, but it doesn't. He strides into the locker room still wearing a big chip on his shoulder. And after patting a few of the boys on the back, he runs into Entwistle.

Dugan puts his hands on his hips and lets his eyebrows nudge each other over his nose.

He gives one of those looks.

"What's wrong with you, Entwistle?" he demands. "You been standing around like a cigar store Indian. You paralyzed or something?"

Entwistle just shrugs, and his blank face looks blanker than usual.

"Reckon I don't know just what's wrong, 'cepting I don't feel just right out there," he says lamely.

Well, Dugan doesn't get a chance to make any further retort, because just then Brightmyer staggers in.

Yes, staggers is the word. He is struggling under the weight of a huge mail sack, which he dumps at Entwistle's feet with a dull thump.

Entwistle dishes up a peach of a blank look and gulps:

"What in thunder is that?"

I see Dugan's eyes thin out. Brightmyer has a happy smile on his round face.

"Fan mail!" he announces. "Fan mail for Entwistle!"

Dugan's jaw drops like the business end of a steam-shovel.

"Did you say fan mail?"

Brightmyer nods his global head.

"Sure. It's been coming into my office all week. I thought it a good idea to show it to Entwistle before the second half."

Well, by this time Entwistle is busy opening envelopes. And as he glances over them, a great grin of pleasure hovers over his face. Dugan grabs a couple letters and glowers at them, and over his shoulder I make out enough of the letters to see what it's all about.

They are letters complimenting Entwistle on last week's game! They are letters telling him that they enjoyed his clowning in the goal! Letters telling him to keep it up, that he has color, that he will help to popularize soccer in this country!

IT ALL sounds a little crazy. And I guess it kinda intoxicates Entwistle. In fact, it makes Dugan dizzy too. He opens his mouth to say something, but Brightmyer chimes in and Dugan clams up again.

"You see?" says Brightmyer in an I-told-you-so tone of voice. "The fans love you, Entwistle! They say you

have color! You're supplying something on the soccer field that soccer needs. Something to help put it across with the American people!" His eyes shine with a fanatic light. "Go on out there, Entwhistle, and clown to your heart's content! Don't get out of hand, but put on a show for the crowd!"

Suddenly Dugan blows a fuse.

"Is this a soccer game or a three-ring circus?" he howls.

"Both," says Brightmyer happily. "Both, rolled into one."

Now, you can imagine Dugan's feelings. Dugan, the conservative. Dugan, the soccer-lover. Having to put up with a screwball like this Entwhistle!

Dugan walks away from there, shaking his head dolefully. I can see he is about ready to throw up the sponge.

"I don't get it," he mumbles. "Movie stars get fan mail. And baseball players, maybe. But soccer players! This never happened before!"

He is still in a daze when the second half starts. And he continues to be dazed all the while Entwhistle proceeds to enjoy a field day in the goal.

The guy is really a clown. A Pagliacci in a soccer suit. He has the crowd in an uproar most of the time, and to say that he distracts the attention of the Bluebirds from the game is putting it mildly. They forget they are playing soccer half the time, watching this fool.

The first thing he does when he gets on the field is go through the sleight-of-hand stuff again. The fans in the stands howl with delight, and that is all that's necessary to encourage him to go on.

From that time on, during every breathing spell which a goalie has in soccer, he is pulling some stunt. Like dancing an Irish jig between the goal posts. And, one time, actually climbing one of the posts and waving down the field to the opposing goalie. The big ape even turns flips and handsprings, and in general cuts capers the like of which nobody in soccer has ever seen. And the crowd eats it up!

But one thing I must admit. This Entwhistle seems to keep his mind on the game, despite his antics. Whenever the goal is threatened, Entwhistle drops the shenanigans and gets down to business. And he is nothing short of sensational as he dives around the goal, knocking out shots fired at him from all angles.

As the game draws to an end, with

the score still Rangers 3, Bluebirds 2, the Bluebirds put up a terrific attack in an effort to tie it up. And Entwhistle makes one great save after another. Then, with seconds to go, the Bluebirds make their last bid.

With their whole front line swooping in to the attack, they employ a dazzling passing technique that keeps Entwhistle dodging from one side of the goal to the other, like a monkey on a string. And, finally, the inside-right boots a last second shot at the corner of the goal—a tough shot to stop.

Entwhistle dives. A beautiful, graceful swan-dive, with hands outstretched. He comes down on the ground with an earth-shaking thump, but the tips of his fingers touch the ball. He gets just enough finger on the ball to deflect it away from the goal-mouth. And the game ends Rangers 3, Bluebirds 2, a second later!

EVEN soccer players can get enthusiastic about victory, and the locker room is a madhouse of noise after the game. And most important of all, it is obvious that the boys all think Entwhistle is the hero of the game.

Dugan stands in the corner of the room with me, still looking dazed. I guess he cannot understand why the boys should get so het up about this soccer clown, Entwhistle. But just then up waddles Brightmyer.

His round face is a picture of contentment. Such contentment that it drives Dugan to fury.

"You look like a cow that's just been milked!" he growls.

Brightmyer laughs.

"Entwhistle," he says, "is the greatest goalie in the world—if we only let him clown!"

"If what?" yaps Dugan.

"If we let him clown!" Brightmyer gets a tolerant look on his pudgy face. "Don't you see it yet, Dugan? Entwhistle is a natural, a great goalie. Only he's moody. He likes to be the life of the party, the clown, the big attraction."

"A grandstander!" scoffs Dugan.

"If you want to call it that," concedes Brightmyer. "At any rate, he loves the spotlight. As long as you let him clown and grab the spotlight, he'll play a great soccer game. But if you try to stop him—if you squelch his talent for clowning—he gets moody. He gets down. He

loses interest in the game and is no good at all. I figured that way right from the start."

"You figured!" Dugan gets a suspicious tone in his voice.

Brightmyer's face turns pinkish. Then he chuckles.

"Yes. I decided that your efforts to squelch him were hurting his play. So I decided to combat you."

"Combat me?"

Brightmyer nods.

"I decided he needed some incentive to clown, instead of the other way around. So I stayed up late every night this week, writing fan mail to Entwhistle."

I just look at Brightmyer, as does Dugan. And slowly it begins to make sense. No wonder Brightmyer looks weary and red-eyed.

He's been up every night writing fan mail to Entwhistle!

"I wrote it to make him happy," Brightmyer goes on. "To make him think he had supporters among the fans. And come to think of it, I don't believe I was wrong. The fans *did* eat it up!"

Dugan swallows hard.

"I guess it was the fan mail that did it," he admits at last. "During the first half he was lousy, because I'd bawled him out and told him not to clown. But when you brought in the fan mail, that convinced him I was wrong and he was right. And with a little urging from you, he went out there and did his stuff."

"He did his stuff all right," I put in. "He stopped some hot shots in that last half."

"Yeah," breathes Dugan ecstatically. "Boy—what a goalie!"



Headliners in the Next Issue

SELDOM has a football story carried more impact than **SINGLE THREAT MAN**, by M. M. Tinney, the line-smashing novelet featured next issue. It's a yarn whose roots go back to the recent world conflict—and it's a yarn that will make you think deeply while you are being thrilled by its breakneck grid action. Look forward to a humdinger that will hold your breathless attention from start to finish!

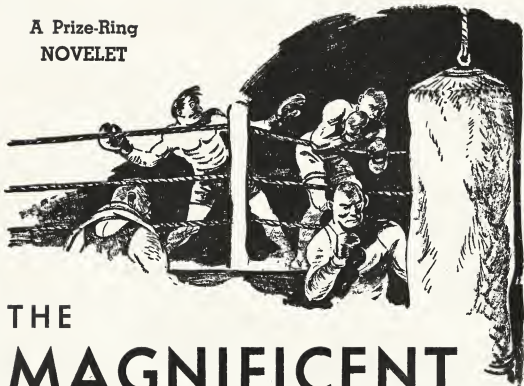
PACKED with surprises, **ORRIN NEEDS A NURSE**, by Roger Fuller, is a swimming novelet that races to a bang-up climax with sure strokes! It's about a big aquatic genius who is also blessed with a talent for getting into trouble—and you'll find his escapades plenty entertaining.

OUR next issue will also present **SAY IT WITH BASKETS**, by John Wilson, a grand novelet of the pro court game, in which star player Whit Reid puts up a fight against selfish elements in his home neighborhood—for the sake of fairness, and for the glory of the game. You'll like **SAY IT WITH BASKETS**—and you'll say it with cheers for a swell yarn.

REAL stories of famous sports personalities in next issue's **THRILLS IN SPORTS**, by Jack Kofoed—in which this famous sports commentator springs some of the best true tales he's been gathering for you. Also, short stories of every sport by your favorite writers—in addition to the headliners listed above—will appear next issue.

THERE'S some excellent sports fiction in our companion magazines—**EXCITING SPORTS**, **POPULAR SPORTS MAGAZINE**, **THRILLING FOOTBALL**, **POPULAR FOOTBALL** and **EXCITING FOOTBALL**—now on sale at all stands. Get acquainted with all of them!

A Prize-Ring
NOVELET



THE MAGNIFICENT McCLOSKEY

By IRVIN ASHKENAZY

CHAPTER I

Like Shakespeare Maybe

AT GROGAN'S GROTTTO, where the sporting gentry incline to dine, one may find food, a tip on a sure thing, or a bookmaker who will give you two to one against. But to Dudley McCloskey, Grogan's was a place where is found the stuff that dreams are made of. Namely, the incomparable Miss Brenda Barnaby.

His battered face lit up like sunlight on a rockpile as he caught sight of her skirting an avenue of tables, adding up his check as she approached. Miss Barnaby was, indeed, the joy of any man's desiring, being small and shapely, with a milky-way of freckles across the bridge of her nose and a knack of wearing the Grotto uniform so that it ap-

peared a trifle too tight in all the right places.

"Baby," he beamed, "I'll have another cuppa coffee."

"It's no use hanging around," she said coldly, ripping his check off her pad. "Like I told you already, I utterly refuse to have a punchy box-fighter in my life." She thrust the check at him in an eloquent gesture of renunciation, let it flutter to his plate, and walked away. "Please do not bother to leave a tip," she fired over her shoulder. The *coup de grace*.

His stunned gaze followed her until all he could see was the coppery bun atop her head as it bobbed among the incoming clientele. Then, as the full

The great Dudley McCloskey was torn between two careers—the poetry that was in his soul and the dynamite that was in his fists!



"You beast!"
Brenda cried
with loathing

significance of her words broke upon him, he gripped the edge of the table and thrust himself halfway to his feet.

"Brenda!" he trumpeted, "Wait! Come back! Hey, Brenda!"

A startled silence swept Grogan's for a moment only before it was consumed in a gale of raucous laughter from Dudley's contemporaries lunching around and about.

Insensible to derision, in the throes of a more poignant agony, McCloskey implored, "B-Brenda!"

Miss Barnaby, about to take another order, hesitated, her natural complexion incarnadining three shades deeper than the make-up over it. She strode back to McCloskey's table, heels clicking an

ominous tattoo on Grogan's tile flooring.

"Are you utterly nuts?" she hissed. "The idea, making a scene when I'm working!"

McCloskey flopped back into his chair. "Y-you d-didn't mean it," he gulped, struggling for a measure of vocal equilibrium, "what you said—"

"I most certainly did!" Her mouth tightened uncompromisingly.

McCloskey weakly motioned a massive paw toward a chair.

"L-look," he faltered, "I-let's talk." Deep emotion always made McCloskey stutter.

"Will that be all?" she disdained.

"No, wait!" he pleaded, fumbling with the menu. "Sure—sure—I don't blame

you. I know I ain't good enough for ya. You was meant for better things than—than—" His voice failed. He heaved a deep sigh. "I was j-just k-kinda—hop-in'," he muttered miserably, pulling the sheet of "Today's Specials" loose from the menu.

Suspecting what was coming, she stepped back defensively. But he held it out to her so that she could see the words he had pencilled on its back.

"For you, baby," he proffered despondently. "I just wrote it." Then, as she hesitated, half turned her head away, he added, "The last one I'll ever write."

SHE permitted herself a glance at his offering. That was a mistake. Slowly, almost as though hypnotized, she reached out, took it, and read:

My gal Brenda's sweet and tender,
With a classy Chassy, soft and slender.
Smoother than a pair of snow-skees,
She's the gal who's D. McCloskey's.

Miss Barnaby brushed her eyes with the back of her hand.

"Oh, Dudley," she whispered.

Hope illumined the gloomy morass of McCloskey's face.

"Gee," he grinned tenderly, "I'm glad ya like it."

"Darling," she began impulsively, "if you'd only—" She caught herself. The bow of her mouth once more tightened. "No!" she whispered. "I won't fall for that again!"

"Huh?"

"What good is it being a genius if you haven't got any brains?" she demanded fiercely sotto voce. "Only an utter dope keeps on fighting when he always loses!"

McCloskey blinked. "But, baby, I give the customers a show, don't I?" he protested plaintively. "So what if I *do* lose sometimes? I lose good, don't I? My position wit' de promoters is tops!"

"Yes," she agreed, "but in the ring it's horizontal!" She shook her head despairingly. "I'll never forget that last fight you had with Dynamite Dixon." She closed her eyes on the sordid memory. "How utterly awful!"

McCloskey waved a deprecating paw. "Aw, I had him licked. I just got careless, that's all."

"Yes. When you were down there the first time you should've stayed down!"

"Now, baby," he reproached, "would I be gettin' this rematch wit' him tonight

if I did so bad, huh?" He reached out, engulfing her upper arm in one hand. "And when I get him in there *tonight*—" he began, grinning with ferocious assurance.

She jerked away. "Oh, what's the use! What's it all getting you?"

"A fight wit' Cyclone Shapiro! Dat's what I get!" he cried, leaning forward earnestly. "And maybe a crack at de title later on! Oh, yeah!" he remembered, digging into his coat pocket. "I gotta coupla tickets for you and your old man." He extended them to her. "Ringside. Take your old man to see the fight tonight, won't you, baby?"

"I couldn't bear it!"

McCloskey reached out and thrust them into her apron pocket.

"Take 'em. Give your old man a treat!"

"You—" she declared tragically, "you with your magnificent poetical genius! You could be like Shakespeare—or even like Edgar Guest, maybe. But instead you keep on getting your brains scrambled by bums who cannot even spell their names, and you're going to wind up on your heels like the rest of them!"

"But, baby—"

"You should spend all your time writing magnificent poetry instead of letting that conniving manager of yours match you against gorillas so he can live off the fathead of the land!"

"But, baby, Spats ain't such a bad guy," McCloskey argued. "Besides, I gotta eat, too, ya know."

She hesitated, biting her lower lip as she stared at him in silence. Then, as if reaching a decision, she pulled up a chair and sat down, ignoring Grogan's scowl from behind the Grotto cash register across the floor.

"Dudley," she confided, "what would say say if I told you I know a man who pays money for poetry?"

McCloskey blinked.

"I mean it! I showed him some of your poems and he thought they were utterly—"

"What!" McCloskey gasped like a punctured dirigible.

"Now listen," Miss Barnaby began placatingly.

"I wrote them pomes for you!" he cried. "Not for laughs!"

She laid a small, eager hand on his arm.

"But he thinks they're utterly magnificent! He does, really! I only had one

of your poems on me at the time, but honest, Dudley, it really sent him, believe you me!"

McCloskey swallowed.

She dug her fingers into his arm. "Don't you see, honey? He'll buy your poems! Pay money for them!" She leaned forward confidentially. "I wasn't going to tell you until I saw him again and closed the deal!"

"Deal?" he muttered.

"Don't you see?" Her eyes shone starrily. "You'll be able to quit this utterly horrible prize-fight business!"

McCloskey opened his mouth like a confused goldfish.

"But why—"

"So!" A familiar rasp aborted his query from halfway across the Grotto. "There you are!"

MISS BARNABY rose to her feet, her eyes congealing frostily as a lean, baggy-eyed gentleman, sartorially distinguished from the top of his derby to the last button on his pearl-grey spats, came to a halt before McCloskey's table.

"Hiya, Spats," McCloskey greeted affectionately.

Mr. Spats Jackson surveyed the array of dishes spread in greasy eloquence upon the table.

"Didn't I tell ya to go easy on the groceries today?" he demanded wearily.

McCloskey waved the question away. "Aw, quit worrying!" he grinned. "Sit down."

Mr. Jackson dropped into the chair Brenda had vacated and picked up the menu.

"The top o' the mornin' to yez!" Grogan's rich, whiskey baritone boomed as he waddled over, beaming.

"Hiya, Pop!" McCloskey greeted the barrel-bellied publican. "Comin' to d' fights tonight?"

Grogan winked. "Whadda ya think? I'm makin' book on the brawl. How you feel?"

"Great!" McCloskey balled his right fist and flexed the bicep dramatically. "I connect wit' dis and d' fight's over."

Spats dropped the menu and looked around. "I'll have the ham hocks and—" He broke off as Brenda started to walk away.

"Brenda!" Grogan called. "Better take Mr. Jackson's order first."

"You take it!" she snapped back. "I'm leaving."

Grogan's blue eyes bugged. "Hey!" He waddled after her. "Whassa big idea, huh? Whassamatter with you?"

"Nothing's the matter with me," she said, pausing impatiently. "You said I could take the afternoon off, didn't you?"

McCloskey gaped at them.

Grogan hesitated. "Yeah," he agreed reluctantly, "but we're kinda rushed now and that's a fact."

"I'm sorry," she smiled, patting him lightly on the jowls, "but this is *utterly* important. You understand." She turned and continued toward the serving door.

Grogan gazed after her, grinning ruefully.

"Brenda, wait!" McCloskey struggled to get out of the corner into which Spats' chair had blocked him. "Brenda, wait a second!"

"Aw, sit down," Spats grunted disgustedly. He planted the palm of one hand against McCloskey's chest and shoved.

"Grogan!" McCloskey appealed, "Grogan, where's she goin'?"

The maitre de Grotto shrugged seismically. "When my best waitress asks for half a day to keep a date, I give it to her and no questions asked."

"To k-k-keep a d-date?" Emotion again unhinged McCloskey's tongue.

Grogan nodded. "Her very words. Not that I'd be losin' any sleep, Dud. You're tops in Brenda's book, and that's a fact!"

"Stop kiddin' the chump," Mr. Jackson said sourly.

A belligerent scowl gave McCloskey's face a remarkable resemblance to a totem pole designed to frighten evil spirits. He thrust it at his manager's sardonic visage.

"Brenda's my girl, see? She ain't the kind that two-times!"

Spats spread his palm on McCloskey's face and pushed it back.

"Okay, okay," he said tiredly. "So what?"

"So we're gonna get married, see? I'm quittin' after this fight! For good!"

Mr. Jackson sighed. "Again?"

"This time I mean it!" McCloskey shouted. "What good is even the title if my brains are scrambled by bums what can't even spell their names or—or—" he spread his hands eloquently, "—or can't use grammar even!"

Mr. Jackson considered his meal-

ticket with a curious blend of humor, pity and disgust.

"So," he said softly, "you figure this other monkey is beatin' your time, so you better go longhair, too, huh?"

"Longhair?" McCloskey stared at him. "What other monkey?"

It seemed, according to Mr. Jackson, that Miss Brenda Barnaby had been stepping out lately, squired by some square named Brown—a strictly long-underwear character who dropped into Grogan's now and then for a short beer and a two-buck horse bet.

"Dames are all alike," Spats moralized, laying an avuncular hand on Dudley's sagging shoulder. "I know. Ya can't trust 'em."

For a long, paralyzed moment, McCloskey stared across the vista of tables, his prognathous jaw set, his eyes unseeing. Suddenly he erupted to his feet, knocking over the table in a crash of silver and crockery and, stepping over the wreckage, surged toward the exit.

"Hey!" Spats cried. "Come back here, you ape!"

But McCloskey was gone.

Grogan clucked commiseratingly. "He's that upset. It's liable to spoil his fight tonight, and that's a fact."

"What difference does it make?" Spats sighed. "You know as well as I do how much chance he stands against Dixon."

Grogan pondered this a moment. Slowly he lowered himself into a chair.

"With a hitter," he shrugged, "there's always a chance."

"Yeah," Jackson nodded bitterly. "Like last time. I lose my shirt on the bum."

He stared moodily at the bus-boys, waiting until they finished setting the table back on its legs. When they left he extracted a bill from his wallet and folded it, leaving a corner exposed so that Grogan could note its denomination. He slipped it inside the menu and pushed it idly toward him.

"Get the best odds you can," he said absently.

Grogan tucked the menu under his arm. "One grand on McCloskey," he said admiringly. "Sure, it's a pig for punishment you are, Jackson."

Mr. Jackson selected a cigarette from a gold case. "I didn't say McCloskey."

Grogan considered him in speculative silence.

Spats Jackson struck a spearpoint of

flame from his gold lighter.

"Bet that dough on Dixon." He touched the flame to his cigarette, then added casually, "To win by a knockout!"

CHAPTER II

Longfellow McCloskey

MISS BARNABY stood before the receptionist-switchboard-operator's little glass window and watched her plug in another incoming call.

"The House of Potts, Books for Tots," the girl sing-songed. "Sorree, Mr. Brown is in conference." She turned, glancing at Miss Barnaby, her eyes ascending the long pheasant feather adorning Miss Barnaby's bonnet.

"I'd like to see Mr. Brown, please," Brenda smiled brightly.

"Have you an appointment?"

"No, but Mr. Brown—"

The switchboard buzzed again.

"Excuse me—The House of Potts, Books for Tots . . . Sor-ree, Mr. Brown is in conference." The operator turned back to Brenda—just in time to see her disappearing through a doorway off the reception room. "Hey!" she called. "You can't go in there!"

But Miss Barnaby was in.

She closed the door behind her, her eyes fixed on the pair of sports oxfords facing her across the office. The said oxfords were reclining on the edge of a large desk. Framed between them was the pale, scholarly face of a young man with a small, sandy moustache. His eyes were closed in slumber behind horn-rimmed spectacles, his chin resting peacefully on his rumpled shirt-front.

"Mr. Brown," Brenda called tentatively. She hesitated a moment, then came a step nearer. "Mr. Brown!"

Mr. Brown's eyes popped open, his feet descending with a crash.

"Oh! Uh—yes, of course—where was I? Uh—" His voice vaporized in owl-ish astonishment. He stared. "Who," he demanded, "are you?"

"Why, Mr. Brown!" Brenda smiled nervously. "I'm Brenda Barnaby. Don't you remember?" She hesitated a moment, then reminded: "Grogan's Grotto—remember?"

"Grogan's—" Recognition smote him.

He leaped to his feet, snapping his fingers in self-reproach. "Of course! How stupid of me!" He strode around the desk and seized both her hands in his. "Brenda!" he beamed. "My fleet-footed goddess of the blue-plate special!" He pulled her around to a chair near his. "Do sit down!" he urged, and sat down beside her. "Well, well, well!" He grinned, rubbing his hands together happily. "I never dreamed you'd actually—"

"Oh, I hope you don't mind," Brenda broke in apologetically, "but I saw your name on the door and you said to come in and see you any time I wanted to, and so I thought—"

"Well met, well met!" Mr. Brown's quick eyes roved delightedly from the tip of her plume to the open toes of her shoes.

"I'd have come sooner," she explained, "but I first wanted to collect all my boy friend's poems together like you asked me." She opened her outsize handbag and dug into it like a squirrel.

"Here!" she exclaimed triumphantly, coming up with a dog-eared sheaf of paper napkins, hotel stationery, telegram blanks, cheap note paper, ancient "Today's Specials" and similar assorted manuscripts. She laid them on the desk before him.

He stared at the motley heap, bit his lip, coughed violently, and sat back.

"Wonderful!" he beamed. "As the bard hath nobly put it, 'The gods send not corn for rich men only!'" He frowned a moment. "*Coriolanus*, I believe."

"Really? Well, if you thought the first poem I showed you was good, Mr. Brown, you should—"

He reached out and grabbed one of her hands.

"The name is Basil," he said.

She nodded brightly. "I know. Mine's Brenda. Now this poem here, for instance—" She withdrew her hand and extended it to extract an ancient rent receipt from the sheaf. She turned it over and began to recite the inspired lines scrawled upon its back:

While standing in front of Grogan's
In the cold grey dawn of day—

"Wait, wait!" Basil squirmed. "Your—er—boy friend is undoubtedly a genius, but unfortunately at the moment," he smiled apologetically, "the Potts Pub-

lishing Company is concentrating on books for children. However—"

"Oh, Dudley has written utterly magnificent poems for children!" She reached over and plucked forth a scrawled-over racing form. "This one's called 'Dainty Cats.'"

"Well—" she stared, but she was already reciting:

Dainty cats with fur like silk
Never guzzle down their milk.
They lap with catly etikett
And never get a whisker wet.

"That," Brenda footnoted, "was for my little nephew, Hector. To learn him manners."

"How perfectly expiring," Mr. Brown breathed admiringly. "However—"

"I *knew* you'd feel the same way about them!" she glowed, clasping her hands rapturously.

MR. BROWN took her clasped hands and caressed them.

"What do you say," he suggested softly, "we discuss Mr. McCloskey's literary cataclysms later on in an atmosphere more—er—conducive to an appreciation of the muse, huh?" He slid his chair closer to hers. "Say, tonight?"

She nodded eagerly. "I have a wonderful idea! Dudley gave me two tickets for his fight tonight at the Metropolitan Arena! Why don't we go there and then—after he recovers—we can all abbreviate the muse together, yes?"

"My dear," Mr. Brown agreed heartily, "we'll not only abbreviate it, we'll obliterate it!" He stiffened as an irate voice outside the door bellowed:

"In conference! What do you mean 'in conference'? Did that nincompoop actually instruct you to tell everybody he was in conference?"

Basil seized her by the elbow, lifting her to her feet.

"This way, dear," he urged as the voice of the receptionist stumbled through a confused explanation.

"B-but—" Brenda protested.

"Forgive me, dear," he apologized hurriedly, propelling her toward a door at the far end of his office. "I've a frightfully important conference. Late already. You don't mind, do you?" He pulled open the door, revealing the outer corridor.

"B-but Dudley's poems—"

"Yes, yes. Quite. See you tonight.

Eight sharp. Toodle-oo." He pushed her out and shut the door quickly. And just in time.

The other door flew open and Mr. Potts stormed in. He was a rotund little man, bald as an egg, with florid cheeks and pop-eyes.

"In conference, eh?" he yelled, his voice breaking in falsetto fury. "Can't talk to no one, eh?"

"Uncle Willoughby!" Basil shuddered. "Your grammar! Remember you're a publisher. You're not in the paper bag business any longer, you know."

Mr. Potts glared at him bitterly.

"I wish to heaven I never left the bag business! At least I didn't have you in it!"

His nephew turned a martyred glance heavenward.

"All right, what have I done *this* time?"

"What have you done! You've murdered us, that's what you've done! Our holiday plans for children's books have been smashed, ruined, atomized!"

Basil stared at him. "What? Now wait a minute—"

His uncle thrust a fat forefinger under his nose. "While you were sitting here in conference we lost Elinor Van Hammer!"

Mr. Brown's astonished stare widened behind his horn rims.

"Who?"

"Van Hammer! The greatest writer of children's books in America!" Mr. Potts pop-eyes narrowed in sudden suspicion. He took a step forward. "You told me so yourself!"

"Oh!" Basil remembered. "Oh, yes, of course! Dear, dear. You mean—"

"I mean," Mr. Potts shouted, "she's been trying to get you on the phone all morning. She finally got disgusted and got in touch with Crabtree and Sneed! They've just signed her! Her agent phoned to tell me! All our plans to crash the children's market with a best seller by Van Hammer are shot! And not only that, your Aunt Bertha's plans for a reception for her are likewise ruined!" He took another step forward, clenching his accusing forefinger in a chubby fist. "You fathead!"

Basil sidestepped and hurried behind the barrier of his desk. He snapped his fingers defiantly.

"A fig for Van Hammer!" he scorned.

"Here I've been working my brain to the bone to line up the greatest genius of our time, a writer whose work will make the kids of tomorrow forget Mother Goose! And this, *this* is the thanks I get!"

Mr. Pott's jaw dropped. "You mean," he said finally, "you've got someone else as big as Van Hammer?"

"As big? Mr. Brown snorted. "Why, there's no comparison! He's one of the major children's poets of our time. And not only that," he added impressively, "he's a very dear friend of mine!" He glanced down at his desk. "Here's the pile of manuscripts he's submitted to us for publication."

Mr. Potts eyed them suspiciously. "What did he do? Empty his wastepaper basket on your desk?"

"My dear uncle," Basil smiled indulgently, "a brief perusal of cultural history will reveal that many of our foremost geniuses wrote some of their greatest works on the backs of menus, wine cards, IOU's and similar odd bits of paper. Take Schubert, take Victor Herbert, take Coleridge—"

"All right!" Mr. Potts broke in impatiently. "Who is he? What's his name?"

"His name?" Basil smiled knowingly, desperately searching his memory. "Ah! Now you're interested, are you?" He chuckled lengthily, his fingers ransacking the papers on his desk.

"I asked you, didn't I?" his uncle snapped. "Who the dickens is he?"

Thankfully, Mr. Brown noted a signature doodled on the corner of a paper napkin.

"His name—" he paused for dramatic effect—"is Dudley—" He cleared his throat as an appropriate middle name blossomed in the jungle of his imagination. "*Longfellow McCloskey*."

"McCloskey!" Mr. Potts scowled. "Never heard of him!"

Basil leaped to the attack. "You never heard of Elinor Van Hammer, either, until I introduced her! Take a look at this masterpiece!" He yanked a grease-spotted "Daily Specials" off the top of the pile, turned it scrawl upwards, and handed it to his uncle. "It's the very essence of childhood!" he enthused. "Go on, read it!"

Mr. Potts adjusted a pair of pince-nez glasses on his bulbous nose, took the manuscript and peered at it intently.

He looked up in surprise.

"Who wrote this? A six-year old?"

"Go on!" Basil encouraged. "Read it! Get the feel of it!"

Mr. Potts hesitated, then slowly, painfully deciphered:

"Tired Mules with Ears that Flop
Look as if they want to Stop,
Stop their weary, Plodding way
And dip their Snozzles into Hay."

"Isn't it delightful?" Basil's eyes shone.

Mr. Potts removed his glasses and replaced them in his vest pocket. He laid the paper back on the desk and stood there, staring at it.

"So full of the mellifluous flow and dreamy imagery so captivating to child minds!" Basil rhapsodized.

His uncle sighed and looked up. "This is good?"

"A masterpiece!" Mr. Brown assured. "Mr. McCloskey has been writing only for limited, privately printed editions, so he isn't as well known, perhaps, as he should be. But under our banner, I'm certain he'll be the best known name in pre-adolescent literature!"

"When are you seeing him again?"

"Why—uh—tonight," Basil beamed. "He has something else he's going to show me." He leaned forward confidentially. "It'll probably be a knockout!"

CHAPTER III

One Punch, One Grand

THE sportscaster for Old Dutchman beer smothered a yawn as he strove to inject a professional pitch of excitement into his microphone.

"McCloskey and Dixon are being waved to the center of the ring now for the referee's instructions. The two boys make an interesting contrast. Dixon standing there, head bent, eyes on the floor, very business-like, and McCloskey looking somewhere off into space, over the referee's head. A number of the fans at ringside tonight have commented on his listless appearance. The odds are two to one now that Dixon will knock him out inside of six rounds..."

Spats Jackson stood on the ring apron outside the ropes as McCloskey shuffled

aimlessly back to his corner.

"Aw, snap out of it, will ya?" Spats drawled as McCloskey sagged against the ropes, awaiting the opening bell. "No dame's worth—" He stopped short as McCloskey stiffened, grabbed the top rope and leaned over, staring into a sea of faces, his features contorted in a gargoyle mask of shocked incredulity.

"It's Brenda!" he cried hoarsely. "She's s-sittin' there, holdin' hands wit' a g-guy, and it ain't her old man!" His teeth bared in sudden berserk fury. "I'll kill him!" he choked, and started to climb out of the ring.

The bell clanged.

"Get back in there!" Mr. Jackson snarled as he flung himself against McCloskey, knocking him back inside the ropes.

Caught off balance, McCloskey reeled backwards across the ring and sat down with a crash, setting off a roar of excited astonishment and laughter.

He scrambled wildly to his feet and saw Dynamite Dixon moving toward him, a contemptuous sneer on his flat, reptilian face. To McCloskey at the moment that face was the embodiment of all the compounded contempt and ridicule he had suffered in his life, the face of a destiny that had doomed him, a gentle man, to the thousand unnatural shocks of a brutal profession and the crueler pangs of despised love. Through a red haze he saw it leering and, with a wild, animal scream of rage, charged it madly...

For some thirty seconds afterwards, listeners to the fight broadcast heard nothing save a wild, roaring bedlam reminiscent of the broadcast explosion of an atomic bomb. When the sportscaster's voice finally came through it was weak and hoarse.

"... now trying to lift Dixon back into the ring. He's still unconscious—out cold! What a punch! McCloskey's still in the center of the ring, looking as if he couldn't believe it himself! I tell you, nothing like this has been seen since the famous Dempsey-Firpo fight over a decade ago. We'll get the winner over to the mike in just a minute! There's his manager, Spats Jackson, leaning against the ropes, watching the throng inside the ring. I don't know what Mr. Jackson did to transform a twelve-to-one underdog into a human tornado but whatever it was, he's got one

of the greatest heavyweight prospects we've seen in many a moon. Yes, sir, Mr. Spats Jackson must be a happy man tonight . . . !"

Mr. Jackson stood on the ring apron and contemplated McCloskey with a rapt melancholy of a man from whom the last of life's illusions have fled.

"One punch," he said in a trance-like whisper. "One grand." And, having uttered this brief obituary, turned wearily away.

It was just after the noonday rush some three weeks later that the telephone rang at Grogan's Grotto and was answered by Brenda, who was serving as cashier while Grogan went across the street for a game of snooker.

It was Mr. Basil Montgomery Brown. Again.

"Have you found McCloskey?" he demanded with an anxiety that had been growing more and more urgent with each successive call. "Has he come in yet?"

"No," she admitted with distress. "Golly, Mr. Brown, I haven't seen him not once since the night of the fight! He hasn't called me—or anything!"

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" Mr. Brown moaned. "Doesn't he ever go home? I've phoned him at least fifty times the past week and he's never in. Never! Did you call him again like I asked you to?"

"Y-yes," she answered with a catch in her voice, "but his landlady says he doesn't want to talk to me! I can't understand it!"

"Brenda, listen," Basil said desperately. "Unless I get his name on a contract by this afternoon, there isn't going to be any book by McCloskey. Not only that, I may find it necessary to resign!"

"Oh, Mr. Brown!" Brenda whimpered, "I can't tell you how utterly depleted I am! I just don't know—"

"If you're depleted," Mr. Brown broke in, "I'm decimated! I'm going over to that boarding house of his right now and stay there till—No, wait a minute! What the dickens does he do in the daytime anyway? Where does he hang out?"

"Well—" Miss Barnaby glanced at the wall clock. "He's probably at the Acme Gym right now. He's fighting Cyclone Shapiro tomorrow night, you know, and—"

"The Acme Gym, eh?" Basil interrupted swiftly. "Very well, I'll go see

him there immediately and sign him!"

"Oh! I—I'd better go with you. They're awfully rough and uncouth and—Hello! Mr. Brown? Hello!"

Mr. Brown had hung up.

DUDLEY McCloskey shuffled lethargically about the heavy bag, following its gentle sway with lack-luster eyes. Occasionally he renewed its movement with a tired push.

"For cryin' out loud!" Spats hissed from a corner of his mouth. "Hit that bag! Hit it! It's hangin' there, helpless! What're ya afraid of?"

McCloskey came to a complete halt, brushing imperceptible sweat from his negligible forehead.

"Gabby Parker, the sportswriter, is over there watchin'!" Spats breathed into his ear. "At least act like a fighter!"

"Who cares?" McCloskey muttered dully.

"Who cares!" Mr. Jackson flared bitterly. "You dumb jerk! I pick ya outa the gutter, I stick with ya through thick and thin, I beat my brains out gettin' ya fights you can win—and now you gimme the 'who cares' routine! And for what? For a dizzy tomatoer what—"

"Don't you call th—that dame no d-d-dizzy—" McCloskey stuttered passionately. "I mean, that t-tomato—"

"Aw, shuddup!"

"Oh, there you are!" a high, Harvard-ish tenor hailed them triumphantly.

They turned and saw Mr. Brown weaving toward them through a circus of rope-skipping, shadow-boxing athletes.

"I *knew* I'd recognize you when I saw you again!" Basil beamed, extending his hand as he approached. "Mr. McCloskey, I want to introduce myself. I—"

"So it's you!" McCloskey roared, long pent-up fury crashing thru his momentary astonishment. "Well, I r-r-recognize you, too, you n-no good little—"

A monstrous paw darted out, seized Basil by the throat and shook him like a cocktail.

Mr. Brown, his glasses falling off, strangled unintelligibly between rattling teeth.

"Let loose!" Spats yelled, yanking at McCloskey's boom-like arm. "Are you nuts?"

McCloskey flung Basil against the heavy bag, which swung back on the reeling Mr. Brown and knocked him sprawling.

Fighters, handlers, and gymnasium hangers-on crowded around as Spats dragged Mr. Brown to his feet. To Basil's purblind eyes they were the shadowy shapes of grinning demons, swarming out of some hellish nightmare. Half-stunned, knees sagging, he staggered about, groping.

"My glasses!" he moaned. "My glasses!"

Mr. Jackson retrieved the indestructible horn-rims.

"Here you are, pal," he offered solicitously. "Your cheaters."

White-faced and trembling, Mr. Brown replaced them on his nose. "What," he quavered, "is the meaning of this?"

"The meaning," McCloskey simmered, "is that you should be c-c-careful whose territory you try to m-m-muscle in on! I don't know your n-name, and I don't care, but," he erupted, "when you fool around B-Brenda Barnaby, your name is m-m-mud!"

"Now take it easy," Spats soothed.

"So I'm takin' it e-e-easy!" McCloskey shook. "I'm not stranglin' him, am I? I'm not b-breakin' every b-b-bone in his body, am I?"

Mr. Brown stared wildly at the leering faces about him.

"This," he squeaked, "is preposterous!"

"No," McCloskey brooded tragically, "I'm j-j-just standin' here, lettin' him live. Maybe I should thank him . . . Yeah. He opened my eyes in time. If it hadn't been him, it would have been somebody else later on."

"Now," Spats congratulated, slapping him on the back, "you're gettin' smart!" He whirled on the onlookers. "All right, break it up, break it up!"

"I assure you," Mr. Brown protested, "that I had no—"

"Scram!" Mr. Jackson snapped.

"Just the same," McCloskey grieved somberly, "it hurts. I can't get over it. Her two-timin' me for that!"

"Now really!" Mr. Brown complained, regaining a measure of self-assurance. "This is a bit thick! My only contact with Miss Barnaby has been purely on business. She suggested that you'd be interested in signing up with me, so I—"

"What!" Spats yelled. "What's that?"

McCloskey blinked. "Huh?"

"She said she'd mentioned—" Mr.

Brown began to elucidate when Mr. Jackson grabbed him by the arm and yanked him half-way around.

"Knifin' me in the back, is she?" he shouted. "Of all the bare-faced gall!"

"This, sir," Mr. Brown declared, clutching at the remnants of his dignity, "is entirely between Mr. McCloskey and myself."

"In a pig's eye it is!" Spats shouted. "After I spend years makin' him what he is today, teachin' him everything he knows? If you think you can steal him from me now, brother, you've got another think comin'!"

Basil shook his head as though trying to clear it. He turned to McCloskey, drawing a folded paper from his inside breast pocket.

"Mr. McCloskey, I have here a contract."

"Okay, brother, you asked for it!" With his left hand, Mr. Jackson yanked off Basil's glasses while his right whistled in a round-house arc, crashing flush against Mr. Brown's jaw.

The editorial director of the House of Potts hit the floor.

THE normal activities of the Acme Gym came to a halt for the second time as its habitués swarmed toward the scene to comment with professional admiration on Mr. Spats Jackson's handiwork.

"Dudley!" a familiar soprano called.

McCloskey heard it above the cacophony of coarse voices.

"Brenda!" He spotted the tip of her pheasant feather above the crowd, moving like a periscope along the rim of an atoll. "Here!" he called, jostling a number of sweaty torsos to one side. "This way!"

She squeezed through the channel he had made.

"Dudley, what's going on here? What—" She stopped short as she caught sight of Basil lying on the floor in slack-jawed oblivion.

"He had a li'l accident," McCloskey explained gently.

"Oh!" she gasped. "OH!" She darted forward and fell on her knees beside the unfortunate young man.

"Mr. Brown!" she cried, lifting his head in her arms. "Mr. Brown, what has he done to you?" His head dropped back with a thud as she snatched up his hands and began to chafe them vigor-

ously. "Mr. Brown!" She looked about frantically. "Somebody get a wet towel! Please!"

"Baby," McCloskey began.

"Don't you 'baby' me, you—you beast!" She shot him a glance of utter loathing.

"B-b-but baby—"

"Don't give McCloskey the credit," Mr. Spats Jackson drawled sardonically. "I soaked him, sister, and that's what'll happen also to the next punk you send to hijack my fighter away from me."

Brenda's tear-bright eyes widened in astonishment.

"Hijack!"

"I really don't need another manager, baby," McCloskey said gently.

Miss Barnaby dropped Mr. Brown's hand and sprang to her feet.

"But, Dudley, Mr. Brown isn't a manager! He's a publisher! He wants to publish your poems. And now," she cried, the tears spilling over, "now you've spoiled everything! Utterly!" She covered her face with her hands and wept.

"Aw, b-b-baby—" McCloskey stuttered in an agony of distress as the throng about them began to disperse in awkward silence.

"He was planning to make you famous," Brenda sobbed with heartbroken bitterness. "And now!"

McCloskey whirled savagely on his manager. "I oughta massecrate ya! Sock-in' my publisher!"

Mr. Jackson spread his hands helplessly. "How did I know?"

Miss Barnaby's heartbroken sobs were cut short by a faint groan that rose from Basil's waxen lips.

"He's comin' to!" McCloskey announced eagerly.

Brenda dropped to her knees beside Mr. Brown's prostrate form.

"Some smelling salts!" she demanded breathlessly. "Get some smelling salts! Mr. Brown! Mr. Brown, are you all right?"

Mr. Brown opened his eyes and blinked feebly.

"We'll take him to my boardin' house!" McCloskey said with swift decision. "It's just a few blocks away. Where's his cheaters?"

Silently Spats picked up Basil's glasses from the mat where he had flung them.

"Hurry!" Brenda urged, wringing her hands. "Let's get him out of this utterly horrible place!"

CHAPTER IV

White Wings of Spring

MR. BASIL Montgomery Brown sat on the edge of McCloskey's bed, his palm cradling his throbbing head while Brenda, Spats and McCloskey hovered about him solicitously.

"Gosh, Mr. Brown, it is sure swell of you to forgive and let bygones be forgotten," McCloskey said eagerly. "Here, have another aspirin. My landlady left the box."

"No, thanks," Basil whispered.

"How do you feel now?" Brenda inquired brightly.

Mr. Brown sighed. "Like a tired mule about to flop."

"Say," McCloskey exclaimed, "I wrote a piece about a tired mule once! I—"

"He knows, Dudley, he knows," Brenda interrupted.

"Well, pal, now that the contract is all settled," Spats grinned ingratiatingly, "anything else we can do for you?"

"Yes," Basil nodded wearily, and turned to McCloskey. "Come to that reception Mrs. Potts is giving in your honor tomorrow night."

McCloskey's brow furrowed. "Jeez, I'd like to—"

"It'd be utterly wonderful!" Brenda enthused starry-eyed.

"Like I told you, pal," Spats explained regretfully, "he's fightin' tomorrow night. He can't."

"That's right," McCloskey sighed. "Can't she make it the next night?"

Basil spread his hands helplessly. "I've already promised Mr. and Mrs. Potts faithfully that you'd be there. The invitations have been sent out! You've got to be there! If you don't—" He closed his eyes in pain—"the reception will not only be ruined, but Mr. Potts may conclude that you do not even exist!"

"Aw, that's crazy!" McCloskey derided. "Tell you what, though—why don't I give ya a flock of Oakleys for the mob what's comin' and then they can all come down and see me at the Arena!"

Mr. Brown shuddered. "That's all I need! No, Dudley, you must keep your pugilistic light under a bushel—but com-

pletely!" He obviously meant it.

"Dudley!" Brenda cried. "You've just got to go to Mrs. Potts' reception! Don't you see what this means to your career?"

"S-s-sure!" McCloskey stammered. "It'll ruin my career! If I don't show up for the fight—"

"Fighting is *not* your career!" Brenda stormed. "It's literature! Don't you see? This is your big chance to meet the—the intelligentsia! The hoi polloi! So they'll write you up in the newspapers and the book review sections so people will want to buy you book!"

"For cryin' out loud!" Spats exploded. "He's got to fight tomorrow night. It means a crack at the title and more dough in ten minutes than he'll ever see in a lifetime of scribblin', not even if he was Herman Hemingway in person!"

"S-sure!" McCloskey agreed eagerly. "I can't muff d' fight, baby! I'll knock off this monkey in a round or two and then—"

"I already told you," Brenda broke in tensely, "I will not marry a common box-fighter!"

"Common!" Spats yelled. "If he was common, d'ya think I'd bet my last grand on the lug? McCloskey's gonna be the next champ!"

"When I grab d' title," McCloskey assured her fervidly, "my poems and stuff'll sell like hot-cakes! All the kids'll be screamin' for 'em! You know how kids are! It'll be written by de champ!"

"Absolutely!" Spats agreed. He slapped McCloskey on the back. "You're smarter than I thought!" He turned to Brenda. "Don't ya see? Bein' champ means success in literature! The newspapers will eat it up! With the publicity he'll get he don't even have to write good! They'll buy the stuff even if it stinks!"

"What do you know about poetry or literature or any of the finer things in life?" Brenda demanded hotly. "Dudley's poems are the only reason I love him and if you think—"

"Gee, baby!" McCloskey beamed, grabbing her arms and gazing fondly into her face. "D' ya really?"

"You will go to the reception, won't you?" Mr. Brown said eagerly, striking while the iron was hot.

Brenda turned to Spats. "We could go for just a little while, couldn't we? We could leave just before time for

Dudley to go into the ring and fight!"

"Yes, yes," Mr. Brown urged, "if you could do only that it would solve my problem!"

"But what are ya gonna tell the Pottses?" Spats demanded. "You can't walk out on a big shindig like that without a good reason—especially when you're the guy they're pitchin' the party for!"

"Dudley could get a headache suddenly!" Brenda suggested brightly.

"No!" McCloskey raised his hand, clutching inspiration. "Y' can tell 'em I—uh—" He grinned in Machiavellian triumph—"gotta give a lecture!"

Spats eyed him incredulously. "A lecture? You?"

Mr. Brown pondered the idea. He grinned wearily.

"Well, why not?"

THE Potts reception was more than merely a social success. As that keenly perceptive chronicler, Hilda St. Bassingham, pointed out in her society column the next day:

It marked the first public appearance of a truly unique literary giant. His physique and mannerisms in themselves seem part of the ironic paradox which inspires his verse—the poems which our book critic, S. Joubert-Tupworthy so aptly describes as 'poetic delicacies which blend in their childish fantasies the bitter hemlock of satire. They are reminiscent of the work of that other genius, Lewis Carroll . . .

Or, as Mrs. Willoughby Potts confided to Mr. Spats Jackson that night: "Just looking at him, it's hard to believe."

In another part of the ballroom her husband was peering between a pair of potted palms at McCloskey engaged in discussing the arts with a throng of curious dowagers. Mr. Potts knocked his cigar ashes into one of the palms and thrust the stogie back into his face.

"That accent," he commented to his nephew out of the corner of his mouth, "is straight Brooklyn if ever I heard it!"

Mr. Basil Brown grinned happily. "The kiddies'll never notice."

McCloskey backed away from his admirers as he spied Brenda approaching.

"Oh, Dudley," she breathed ecstatically, "isn't this utterly elegant? Everybody is so literary here I feel utterly like a bookmark."

McCloskey's fond grin faded as he observed Spats and Mrs. Potts approaching with Mr. Potts and Basil in their wake.

"I told Mrs. Potts we hadda be goin'," Spats announced briskly.

"I'm so sorry you have to leave so soon," Mrs. Potts mourned. "I wish I'd known in advance you were giving a lecture tonight. Why, we'd *all* go!"

"Too bad it's all sold out," Basil interposed quickly.

"Yeah, too bad," McCloskey commiserated, taking Basil's cue. "There ain't even standin' room left."

Mr. Potts bit into his dead cigar and eyed him curiously.

"Well—uh—before you go, I want to talk to you about one of the numbers in your collection of children's verses."

McCloskey blinked. "What about 'em?"

Mr. Potts extracted his cigar and examined it thoughtfully. He looked up.

"It doesn't seem to me to be exactly childish."

"Oh!" McCloskey nodded understandingly. "Too suffocated, eh?"

"Which one is it?" Brenda asked.

"Well—" Mr. Potts cleared his throat. "It's the one called—er—'The White Wings of Spring.'"

Mrs. Potts smiled apologetically. "We just didn't understand the meaning of that title. I know how simply gauche it is, asking a poet to explain his poem, and I realize it is probably of impressionistic significance. However—"

"For kids," Mr. Potts growled, "we got to lay it on the line."

Dudley looked bewildered. "Why—the White Wings is just what it says it is—a street cleaner."

Mr. Potts nodded slowly. "I might have guessed."

"Sure! 'The White Wings of Spring' gives the reactions of a common, ordinary street-cleaner to the comin' of spring!"

Mrs. Potts laughed weakly, as though not quite sure he were joking.

No one else writes about street cleaners except Dudley," Brenda said proudly. "He's different!"

Mr. Potts replaced his cigar once more in his mouth. He nodded. "I agree."

"Remember how it goes?" Brenda sparkled, turning to McCloskey. "It's utterly magnificent! Recite it for us, honey."

McCloskey cleared his throat and forthwith hoarsely chanted:

While standing in front of Grogan's
In the cold grey dawn of day,
I'm pickin' things from the gutter
And lettin' others lay—
While in my eager nostrils,
To tell me spring is here,
Comes the smell of a wagon loaded
With barrels of fresh bock beer!

He gulped a deep breath and was joined by Brenda:

Oh spring is here, Oh spring is—

"Wonderful!" Basil broke in, applauding loudly. "Wonderful! But if you're going to keep that lecture engagingment—"

"Yeah," Spats agreed, taking McCloskey's arm as the surrounding guests, sparked by Basil's hurried applause, joined in with a wave of polite clapping and varied degrees of astonishment, "we gotta scram."

"You will remember to write a substitute for that verse, won't you?" Mr. Potts reminded as they reached the door.

"Sure thing, Pottsy!" McCloskey grinned jovially. "I'll dream one up on my way to the Arena."

Mrs. Potts' eyebrows lifted. "The Arena?"

"Sure! The Metropolitan—"

"Where he's giving his lecture tonight!" Mr. Brown broke in. "Eh, Dudley?"

"Huh? Oh—oh, sure!" McCloskey grinned in sheepish confusion. He stepped over the threshold as the butler opened the door, waited for Brenda and Spats to follow him out, grinned again at his hosts standing in the doorway, and clasped his hands over his head in a farewell salute.

"Well, goodnight gang!" McCloskey said as he shook hands with himself, walking backwards a few paces ere departing.

CHAPTER V

It Rhymes with Rubber

EVEN the announcer was awed.
". . . one of the biggest crowds in the history of the Metropolitan Arena,"

he proclaimed. And he was undoubtedly correct. The sea of faces waiting the main-go attested to the rise in McCloskey's stock as the result of his late victory over Dixon.

Spats Jackson knelt on one knee beside McCloskey's stool, repeating over and over, with minor variations:

"Rush him, keep on top of him, don't give him no chance to box; slug, see? Slug, slug, slug! No boxing. Don't box. He's a boxer, you're a hitter. Hit 'im! Rush him! Finish it! Slug! Fast! Quick! Punch!" He spouted the words into McCloskey's ear like a machine-gun gulping down a belt of bullets. "I got Pop Grogan helpin' me between rounds," he went on, "but the shorter you make it the sweeter it'll be. Rush 'im at the bell! Throw—"

"What rhymes wit' rubber?" McCloskey interrupted thoughtfully.

Spats' jaw dropped. "Huh?"

"Rubber," McCloskey frowned. "I gotta get a word that rhymes wit' rubber."

"Are you nuts?" Spats demanded.

McCloskey sighed, shaking his head. "I give up."

"You and me both!" Mr. Jackson exploded. He jabbed McCloskey in the ribs as the referee waved the two fighters to the center of the ring. "Get over there!" He climbed out of the corner and dropped off the apron. "Man, oh man," he muttered, shaking his head.

Grogan peered at him inquiringly.

"My boy," Spats sighed. "He's talkin' foolish."

Grogan clucked commiseratingly. "Sure and them punches in the head begin to tell sooner or later. I told you to bet your money on the other bum."

"That's what I did last time," Mr. Jackson hissed bitterly and turned away as Grogan began lining up the smelling salts, colloidion and water bucket for instant use. "My boy can hit," Spats said as though trying to reassure himself.

He jumped back on the ring apron as McCloskey turned from the center of the ring and shuffled leisurely back to his corner. Dudley's lips were moving in a whisper, a dreamy, far-away look in his eyes.

Mr. Jackson leaned over the ropes. "What? What's that?" he asked, straining to hear.

But all Spats could make out was a

half-whispered gibberish:

"Rubber—tubber—gubber—wubber—hubber—mubber—"

The bell clanked.

"Rush him!" Spats yelled weakly.

McCloskey raised his hands in conditioned reflex, turned, and shuffled out to meet his adversary. He pivoted lumberingly as Cyclone Shapiro, a pantherish young man with a dead pan and a darting left, circled. McCloskey rotated, peering between his gloves with eyes that looked past Shapiro into a far-off, private world.

The Cyclone reversed his direction, circling the other way, his left flashing out like a striking snake. McCloskey blinked, his nose, suddenly red and puffy, bringing him back to a throbbing awareness of the job at hand. He stood in the center of the ring, tasting the salty blood trickling from his nose, blinking away the tears from his eyes as he turned to follow the black-haired will-o-the-wisp who harried him.

Mechanically he blocked another jab, caught a hook to the head, clinched, stepped ack, caught another jab, blocked a right cross, covered up behind arms and gloves, making to attempt to retaliate, but just standing in the center of the ring, turning with his opponent, taking punishment . . .

"I'm tellin' ya," Spats moaned, "his mind has snapped!"

GROGAN watched McCloskey and shook his head sadly.

"Yeah, I've seen it happen time and again. Bright as a dollar one day, droolin' the next."

The crowd came roaring to its feet as Shapiro suddenly fainted a right, ducked, and came up with a bolt of left-hook lightning that cracked against the side of McCloskey's head! McCloskey flung his arms around the Cyclone in a wild embrace and hung on.

Shapiro struggled to break loose, pumping short, vicious blows into his body as the referee clawed at them, trying to pry them apart.

"So you're the great McCloskey!" the Cyclone panted in Dudley's ear.

"Ya bum! What'd you pay Dixon to lay down?" His face contorted in pain as McCloskey stepped on his feet. "I'll kill ya, ya yellin' hunka blubber!" he snarled, struggling desperately to free himself.

McCloskey suddenly let go, permitting the referee to crash between them. He stood staring at the Cyclone, his arms at his sides.

"Blubber!" he whispered, wide-eyed. "Blubber!" A slow smile of triumph had begun to dawn on his face when suddenly the world disintegrated in a shower of multi-colored lights. . . .

"Dudley! Dudley, dear!" Brenda bent tearfully over McCloskey's still form stretched on the dressing-room table, his lids half-open, the whites of his eyes showing glassily. "Can you hear me? It's Brenda!" She whirled on Spats and Grogan standing behind her. "Where's the doctor?" she demanded frantically. "What's keeping him?"

"Now, now," Grogan soothed. "We'll take care of him, honey. You better go home."

"I will not!" she flared indignantly. "He may be dying!"

Mr. Spats Jackson spat. "Keep your shirt on," he sneered. "He was out for over three hours onct. Everybody thought he was dead. But no such luck!"

A faint moan escaped McCloskey's lips.

"Be glory," Grogan observed, "he's comin' to at last."

"Help me!" Brenda pleaded as she struggled to raise Dudley to a sitting position.

"His lips are movin'!" Grogan announced. "He's tryin' to talk!"

They crowded around him, but all they could hear were two words whispered mechanically, over and over:

"Rubber — blubber — rubber — blubber . . ."

Spats grimaced. "Shapiro's punch was all he needed."

"Dudley," Brenda crooned, "Dudley,

dear, what is it?"

"That's it!" McCloskey suddenly cried, staring into space. "That's it!"

"What?" Brenda asked anxiously.

"Darling, what is it?"

Slowly McCloskey's head turned until he was looking directly into Brenda's eyes. Slowly, with dawning consciousness, her tear-stained face resolved out of the mists that clouded his brain. His eyes fixed upon her, his voice swelling with returning strength and mounting inspiration, he began to chant in sing-song rhythm:

"Baby whales with twinkling eyes
Behave themselves if they are wise.
A baby whale that doesn't mind
When mama calls is apt to find
That though his hide is tough as rubber
He'll soon be caught—"

He hesitated—and then, in climactic triumph, finished:

"—AND BOILED FOR BLUBBER!"

They stared at him, open mouthed.

Brenda broke the silence. "Of course!" she whispered. "Of course!" She clasped her hands in enraptured understanding. "Mr. Potts' new poem! Oh, Dudley, you're magnificent!"

A strangling noise issued from Mr. Spats Jackson. He yanked a dog-eared document from his pocket and thrust it under McCloskey's nose.

"Listen, canvasback!" he snarled. "We're through, see?" He tore the document into small pieces and flung them into McCloskey's face. "That's what I think of your contract! From now on Brenda can manage ya for all I care!"

"As a matter of fact," Miss Barnaby said complacently, "that's exactly what I intend to do—from now on!"

Tired Kidneys Often Bring Sleepless Nights

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. When they get tired and don't work right in the daytime, many people have to get up nights. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder. Don't neglect this condition and lose valuable, restful sleep.

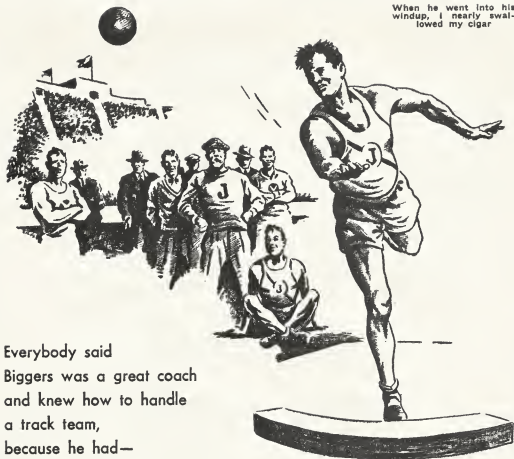
When disorder of kidney function permits

poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may also cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 50 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills,

(Adv.)

When he went into his
windup, I nearly swal-
lowed my cigar



Everybody said
Biggers was a great coach
and knew how to handle
a track team,
because he had—

WHAT IT TAKES

By WILLIAM O'SULLIVAN

WHAT it takes to be a successful track coach, I have.

I'm not big-headed about it. Everybody says so. The athletic board here at track-conscious, track-great Jefferson College said so with a new contract. The record says so. Even Maryanne says so, and Maryanne never says anything she doesn't mean.

I'm 'Tiny' Biggers, as you've already guessed from the above. Even if you are one of those people who don't know anything about track, you must listen to the radio, or see the newsreels, or catch a corner of the headlines of the sports pages when you are looking at the box scores.

It was a wonderful break for me when

Flash Gooding, the old and automatic track coach at Jefferson, stepped down and said they should have a younger man to take it. And I took it. For two years, I took it. From the grad manager of athletics, from the sports writers, and other colleges and universities when they met us on the cinder paths and in the field events.

Then along came Tex Souder, the weights man.

That was hardly an accident, his coming along. Tex Souder had been a stand-out in the shot and the hammer, in the Southwestern Conference; and he could do things with the discus and the javelin, too. I'd found out Tex Souder was interested in pre-med.

Being not too unsharp, I had analyzed our chances and I had come up with what might have been the answer. Bodie Salich and Chuck Fenner were good for places in the sprints. I was weak in the middle distances. King Derriman was a sure placer, in the mile. And cross country was, as usual, our meat.

Cross country, we have always stressed at Jefferson as a great conditioner. For any sport. It builds the legs, increases the wind, and puts a fine edge on the athlete. And you know how it is at a college, the boys see someone they admire doing something, and they've got to do it, too.

AND as far back as anybody could remember, everybody at Jefferson had gone in for cross country, even if they hadn't gone out for cross country. Any day in good weather, you could see them, the athletes and the stooges and the 'townies,' the citizens of Jefferson-town, even, jogging out across the fields and the meadows and up hill and down dale and through streams and along the roads.

I guess, to a foreigner—I mean, any non-Jefferson man—it might be a funny sight. To see a gang of a hundred and more men of assorted ages and wearing anything from football gear to shorts and sneakers, pounding along the cross country stint.

One time, even, in the dead of winter, I saw a couple of eager-beavers going over the course in snowshoes. And another time, a bolt of lightning struck a tree, on a summer's day, and edged the track-gear off a student who was galloping by on his run. And just to show you proper Jefferson spirit, the kid kept running. Until he got to a stream deep enough to hide in.

In Holland, everybody has a bicycle. In Japan, everybody takes his shoes off before going into a house. At Jefferson, everybody runs. Runs, or throws things. What football is to Notre Dame, what boxing is to Wisconsin, what wrestling is at Oklahoma A & M, that's track at Jefferson.

And what Law is at Harvard, or Medical at Johns Hopkins, that's Pre-Medical at Jefferson College.

I saw, in my analysis of our chances, that a guy like Tex Souder could be the answer. And much as I would rather have a man I had developed myself—so

that other coaches couldn't horn in for the credit—I wanted, first, a good weights man, and Souder wanted a good Pre-Med course, and a chance to make a big name.

I saw another thing, too, after I had got Souder to come up and look the Pre-Med course over. I saw he was going to be a hard man to handle. He was temperamental. He started sulking at lunch, when the steak was cooked too well-done for him, and he got worse when they put his scoop of ice-cream under the pie instead of on top of it.

In fact, he was washed up, through, going to leave, when something I said stopped him, held him, changed his mind. I don't know what it was I said. I've often wondered.

I remember talking a lot, and fast. And I remember I said, "Hello, Babe!" to Maryanne Sheldean, and jumped up to pull a chair over for her and introduce Tex.

Then, somehow, Tex Souder got cooled off again, and he sat down with us, and he forgot the ice-cream was under his pie and in fact he forgot all about the pie and the ice-cream.

Maryanne Sheldean is Prexy Sheldean's daughter, and there was a sort of unspoken understanding between us ever since I was graduated, which was only four years ago.

In fact, most everything between Maryanne and me was unspoken, because Maryanne is one of those rare, rare things—a brainy young woman who keeps quiet and lets you enjoy the scenery wherever you are. And wherever Maryanne is, that's the scenery.

Maryanne is five-foot one, and her blue-blue eyes are sooted up with long, curling lashes, and you've never seen really lovely red hair until you've seen Maryanne's. Just think of all the ideal specifications, write them down on paper—you needn't be careful about the writing—and after one look at Maryanne you'd be tearing the paper up.

I told her, there at lunch, about Tex maybe coming to the college, and I told Tex about her being Prexy's daughter, and Tex gave me a wounded look.

"Did you say *maybe* I was coming to Jefferson? Why, Mr. Biggers! I thought it was all settled?"

"Oh," I said. "I didn't hear you, Tex."

The big goon smoothed his mousy hair down with his hands and said, con-

fidentially, to Maryanne:

"Isn't it funny the way a few years—only a few, of course!—will make you absent-minded? Like Mr. Biggers, here? Now, I got an uncle at home in Texas, old Unk Beesom, who sometimes doesn't even hear the dog barking when it is sitting in his lap. A little deaf, sure—but mostly absent-minded, you know."

I was a little sore because I knew, from looking at his papers, that I was only four years older than he was, than Tex was. And with my blond hair cut crew-style, I looked younger than him. But I guessed his gripe.

"Yes-s," I said. "I'm just falling away with decrepitude. Four years older than you. And also two inches taller, not to mention ten pounds heavier, and maybe two inches less in the bread-department. That's what you need for the weights, though. Height."

THAT'S always the tender spot with a weights man, with a shot-putter or a hammer-thrower or a javelin man. The taller he is, the better start he gives what he is throwing. I've often wondered how much more actual power it takes for a man, an inch shorter than another man, to throw an object the same distance. I guess a math wizard could figure it.

You'd have to go into such computations as the man's weight, the length of his arms, how high or low behind his ear he carried the shot, what his speed was in skipping across the circle to make the put, and things like that. So the heck with it, I was never an Einstein, and all I knew was that the taller the man, the better distance he could get, other things being equal, and I knew this would rile Tex.

He was looking around him, trying to figure out something to say back, I guess. And then he laughed and yelled, "Meatball!"

I thought he was still hungry, but it was a man, not an order, he was calling. Maryanne and I looked and saw a big, grinning, dark gent who even had maybe an inch on me, stopping there to wave at Tex, and then going on again.

"That's Meatball," Tex said, vaguely, turning back to us. "His name is Something Leonidas. He's coming here, too. He is a GI student. Formerly a Navy Sea-Bee. I am sharing a room with him, for right now. Big, isn't he? Hmmm,

I bet he's taller'n you, Mr. Biggers?"

"Could be," I agreed. "How's he with weights?"

"All his work," Tex chuckled, "is in the books. It seems he is cramming four years into two, or something. Miss Sheldean, where did you say you lived?"

I could see I was going to have trouble with Tex. He was too—temperamental.

"What are you doing tonight?" the ape asked, after he had written down Maryanne's address in two different notebooks, and then made a third record of it on a loose envelope. "Maryanne?"

"Tiny and I are going to the movies," Maryanne said, with that dream-smile taking the sentence of death out of it. For him, I mean. "What are you doing tonight, Mr. Souder?"

"Going to the movies," Tex grinned happily.

I'd never seen Maryanne looking prettier than she did that night, when I came up the porch steps. Unless it was when she was standing next to me in the picture when the engagement shot was taken.

She was standing by the post, the light from Prexy's tablelamp manufacturing halos for her hair and dusting stars into her eyes. She was so beautiful, and she was wearing a perfume that was as out-of-the-world as she looked. I didn't see anyone else, I was so busy looking at her and taking both her little hands in my big ones, until Tex spoke up from the shadows.

"Mr. Biggers, I presume?"

"A wonderful guess," I said sourly, looking knives at him in the dark. "Aren't you going to be late for the movies?"

"Business," Tex said, getting up and creaking the porch with his weight. "Business, and the old college spirit. I brought Meatball along. To meet you, Coach. Coach Biggers, this is Spurgeon Leonidas, better and more simply known as Meatball."

The flooring creaked again, and louder, and the big, dark, curly-haired man I'd seen in the restaurant that day was losing my hand in his, but finding enough of it again to crush it gently.

"Tex told me about you being so nice to him, Mr. Biggers, and he said you badly needed weights men. So I wanted to ask you if I could try out."

"I have an office, you know," I rebuked him mildly. "But I'll take your

name and we'll be looking for you. Sturgeon Leonidas?"

"Spurgeon," he corrected. "A sturgeon is a fish."

"I seem to know the name Leonidas," I said, trying to recall.

"There was a Greek general of that name," Leonidas said, with a chuckle. "That is it, yes? I like to do with the weights, and while I was in the Sea-Bees I was in some service meets."

"Come out with us tomorrow," I said. "At four. We'll see what you can do."

"Your hours for practice," Leonidas said, "are inconvenient. I wished to discuss that, too."

That got my Jefferson-spirit ruffled. "What sort of Jefferson man are you?"

I asked him sharply. "You know what you are here for? You know what the school expects, wants, of you?"

He sighed. "You are so right," he murmured. "Thank you for reminding me. I shall go now, yes?"

Before I could say yes, also, Tex boomed:

"Why, we are all going to the movies, Meatball. Stick around and go with us. We would love to have you! Wouldn't we, Coach?"

While I was sorting out the good words from the bad, so I could make a clear but decent reply, Maryanne broke out with one of the longest speeches I'd heard her make.

"Yes, we would," she said, smiling.

FLANKING her, they helped her down the steps, and I thought she looked like a peach caught between two crates of lemons. But I got the inside track as we drew near the movies, Tex falling behind and pulling at Leonidas' sleeve. And then I saw why.

I was stuck for the tickets.

Tex said, "Knowing you are older, I don't want to be fresh and buy the tickets, Coach."

Leonidas said simply, "There is no use for me to pretend I can afford for all. I cannot. I think it would embarrass you less if I let you pay mine, than to make a show and haggle about which amount I owed?"

I'd looked forward to seeing that particular picture, but I didn't know, now.

It took some fancy open-field work for me to block Tex out of the seat on Maryanne's right. Leonidas had run interference over the knees we had to buck

to get to the seats, and he was on her left.

But I made it, and was thinking maybe the show would be good, after all, when I learned what sort of moviegoer that big lug of a Tex was.

Some folks, you know, shatter your ribs with an elbow to drive home a screen joke, as if you were so dumb you'd miss it, otherwise. No, that wasn't Tex. Tex was the guy who knew the lyrics they were singing, and now he leaned part way across me to sing them at Maryanne, the more tender ones, as if he was the guy we had come to hear and not the star.

I stood it for two lyrics, and then I said:

"Either uncouple your sound track, Tex, or do something for your onions."

"Heh-heh!" he laughed. "Okay, Mr. Biggers, sir."

"And cut out that Mister Biggers. I'm not that old."

"We'll be pals!" the big stinker beamed at me. "You call me Tex, and I'll call you Pop!"

I don't know how much they pay those movie-reviewers. It was a flop of a movie.

I bumped against Leonidas' muscles when we were going out, and I got an idea.

"Don't you mind Tex calling you Meatball?" I asked. "Doesn't that get you mad?"

The big Greek shrugged. "Names are for identification," he said. "The name Meatball identifies me to my friend Tex, so it is all right. He learned that of the fifty-three thousand lunch-diners in New York City, the Greeks own ninety-five percent of them. He learned also that my father's lunch-diners are noted for the big size and the low price of the meatballs. So—he calls me Meatball. It identifies me to him. It is all right."

And I'd heard the Greeks were tough! I was disgusted.

But I was fairly pleased with the way things looked, for track. Tex was covering fifty feet, and had some in reserve. In Corgy Rowell I had a sure placer, and maybe better than that if I wanted to tinker with his style. He was good with the old arm-back style, and maybe would have been better with a Finnish-carry hold. But I like to keep things smooth and stashed down, so I let him alone.

And then along came Tex's pal, Meatball Leonidas, in work-gear, and when I looked at him I got to thinking about Torrance, of Louisiana. About the same size. Six-five and a little. And built like the drydocks he used to work on with the Sea-Bees during the war.

He was clumsy, a little, and he was anxious, a little, and he was just a little under forty-eight feet with his first heave. My eyes bugged out. He did it again, twice, and I got him into my office, after he was dressed.

"So you decided you could spare the time, huh?" I opened up.

"Just for today," Meatball said, looking at the blisters on his palms. "I didn't want to come out, but—well, I just like playing with the heavy weights so much, you see?"

That burned me up like a bride's biscuits.

"Very, very, very nice of you," I said. "But really, I don't think you should waste your time on us like this!"

He smiled. "I think you are perhaps correct."

"What are you here for, anyway?" I snapped. "To kid around? Or are you here to make your mark for the college?"

He blushed a bit. "You are right. Now, isn't it possible that you could coach me after hours—or, say, around five in the morning?—so I will not waste time?"

I figured I could deadpan it as well as he could.

"What a great idea!" I enthused. "But I'm busy at five in the morning. With another Greek named Morpheus. Now, maybe you could come around on my dates at night, huh? When I'm with Maryanne? Or wouldn't that be convenient for you?"

I lost my temper about then.

"Now, beat it, if you have anything to do. I'm busy, and I have no time to waste with a man who has no right ideas about college, about what he is here for, about college spirit!"

He beat it.

I GOT a fright over my intended sarcasm that night when I climbed Maryanne's porch steps and saw a big figure there in the gloom, next to Maryanne. But it wasn't Meatball. It was Tex.

"Hi, Pop!" he greeted me. "I bet you thought I was Meatball? Meatball is inside, with Prexy. Er, I mean, with

Dr. Sheldean. They are doing something involved about the moon's orbit, in math. Me, I'm checking things for them, outside here."

I was sizzling. I looked at Maryanne. "I thought I had a date tonight?"

"Spurgeon," she muscled it, "said you'd told him to come along."

"It didn't sound right," Tex put in, "so I came along to check and see everything was okus-dokus. Is everything okus-dokus?"

"Yes!" I snarled. "Everything is gorgeous!"

"Why, Willson!" Maryanne reproved me. "The boys are so interested in your ideas. Why, Willson Biggers!"

"So I see, heh-heh," I said. I had some ideas, about Maryanne, when I had come up. Now I had ideas about Tex. "Heh-heh."

Tex grinned hugely. "Tell us kids about your triumphs, Pop," he said. "Give us pointers on how we can improve! Hey, Meatball? Pop is ready to talk to us. Meatball!"

The Greek came hurrying out in a minute.

"Oh, what bliss!" he enthused. "Dr. Sheldean is interested in some of my theories, and has invited me to come any night, every night!"

I said something, and when Maryanne looked shocked, I raised my voice.

"I said, 'What bliss,' Maryanne. And I said I was hungry and could stand a sandwich. What did you think I said?"

"Something like that," she murmured.

"Now, Pop," Tex urged, hunching his chair forward in mock eagerness. "Tell us all! Tell us how you won the last Olympics. Or was it the first Olympics?"

Meatball said, "Tch, tch, tch, Texas. The first Olympic Games were two thousand years ago!"

"Well?" Tex asked.

I got an idea, then. If that Tex was going to make out I was like his father in age, I would act like his father in fact. And lecture him at any and every opportunity.

I started with the letter A in the shot technique, and gave him a short talk on which hand to lift the shot with, and why. In a while, Tex started to get fed up with it, but I was on the goon like a terrier. I had another idea.

I went in and got Dr. Sheldean—Ab-salmon X. Sheldean himself—to come out and give us a talk on Forces Required

to Overcome Gravity and Sustain Flight. Maryanne and I sat on the swing, in the outer dark, while Doc Sheldean gave the two big apes the benefit of his learning. It wasn't a bad world, after all.

That was the founding of what the wise guys around the town came to call The Elephant Corner. Nights, there we were, the three of us—Meatball, Tex and myself—and there was Maryanne. And the name 'Pop' sort of got stuck to me now, but I didn't like it any, so I just kept up my little 'rib' of talking down my snoot at Tex.

Lectures on the discus, the javelin, the hammer. Theories. Practices. Stances. I would always manage to get in some little reminder, too. Like:

"Now, at the I-C-4-A Championships, a few years ago, it was raining, and Coulter of Army looked to be in. But I noticed that the boys sort of had made a little pit where their left feet were slapping down for the twist and the heave. So, although it was a chance, I tricked my step-spacing and made my twist-takeoff from behind the regular spot. But it was higher, see, just a fraction. So my puts were longer. Also a fraction, but longer."

Meatball got excited and went inside and we could hear him arguing with Doc Sheldean over an equation that would explain why.

But after a while, Meatball started staying inside with Prexy more, so I started seeing him less, until one day a truck nearly knocked me down and I yelled, "Whyncha blow ya horn?" but it was Meatball, trotting through town on a cross country.

"Getting the right spirit," I thought. Then I got the idea that maybe he had lined up with some frat, and I could work on him through them. Because I was anxious about my chances. Tex wasn't steady, and he wasn't improving his best marks. When I saw Meatball at Prexy's again, I asked, "What bunch you belong to, Meatball? What frat?"

"None, yet," he shrugged. "But—I'm hopeful. I'm going to try and come out again, soon, now that outdoor season has opened. However, I don't want to waste my time."

I bubbled over like a percolator.

"No, you don't," I told him. "Neither do we, see? Maybe you better give the YMCA a play. Then you can run things to suit yourself."

HE JUST plain didn't have the right spirit. Take the way he was going through, for instance. Meatball was a naturalized citizen, and he had one of those mixed-up foreign educations where he was away up in some things, some subjects, and lacking in others. Lacking in things like Physical-Ed.

But he had had a lot of this and that, and with so much study he could go through Jefferson in two years. Two years, when he was a GI-student, and could have had four for free!

Tex was different. Tex had been a soph when he'd left Texas, but he was smart enough to go into frosh all over again. See what I mean?"

Then I heard Meatball had joined some frat, and I forgot my gripe, because Tex really got to be stinking in spades. I asked Cully Rhinestrum about Meatball's outfit, and he told me.

"Phi Beta Kappa," he said.

I frowned. "Is that that new, small gang down by the tracks?"

"No," Cully said. "You'll find the Phi Beta Kappas in that big, new place. The library, pal."

So I quit worrying about Meatball, and I started to worry harder than ever about Tex. I decided to shoot the works in handling the temperamental fellow. Heck, I had to.

For one thing, the annual YMCA meet was coming up. At Jefferson, that was like an alumni-varsity game would be at another school. Nearly all Jeffersontown boys went to Jefferson because they grew up running the cross country and throwing things, like all the townies and the students do. And nearly all Jefferson-towners signed in at the Y when their varsity days were over, and they stayed in shape and once a year we had a meet with them. And the annual Y meet was coming up.

That, I couldn't lose. We had just barely nosed out Princeton, with Tex lucking through in the shot and placing in the hammer—the Tiger shot-putter sprained his ankle, or Tex would have lost that—and Penn had scored a tie with us when Tex had folded like a GI-cot.

But if I lost to the Y, the town would never let me forget it!

So I went to Maryanne one afternoon, when I knew she would be alone, and I put it to her straight.

"Honey," I said, "Tex is sour. Very sour. And I think I know the reason.

You. And me. See? Now, I want to ask you a favor. Please give the jerk a coupla dates. Just by himself. Will you? Without me around."

"Why, Willson!" she said, sooting me with her lashes.

"Yes, it means that much," I said. "Kid him along a bit, see? Make out you've gone for him. It—it ought to perk him up, get him back on the beam. You might even slip him a little kiss, see? A little one."

"Why, Willson!"

"Okay?"

She looked at me a long minute, then smiled slightly, and she made an 'O' with a slender index finger and a thumb tip. "Okus-dokus—Pop!"

I purposely stayed away a few nights, and I wondered was my sacrifice worth it. And then Tex came out grinning all over a few days before the Y meet and tossed the li'l 16-pounder a casual fifty-two feet, three inches!

And he whipped the old hammer up and around and around and he let it go, and it went. One hundred seventy-one feet, it went! No record, of course not. But it was twenty feet better than the ape had done in the Penn meet.

I knew I had what it takes to handle a track team, when I saw that. Just wait until we hit the YMCA meet!

That could have waited forever, and one day more.

The whole town turned out, of course, and everybody from the mayor to Jerry Black, our rubber, was in track gear and trotting around. Jumping and pitching and tossing and hurdling and vaulting with the pole and sprinting.

Bands played, the sun shone, the red-bud was in bloom, and the blossoms were on the late fruit trees, school cheers and songs rocked up into the sparkling air, and the college colors snapped and flirted in the breeze from the towers above the stadium. Which shows you how deceptive things can be.

Ten minutes later, I was staring at the results of some of the sprints, and the middle distances, and I saw it was going to have to go to the field events to be settled.

But it would all iron out when Tex got his hands on the hammer and the shot. Heck, I would even enter him in the discus and the javelin, and take the Decathlon, just in case of a tie.

It was along about then that I saw

Meatball, big and grinning and laughing right out loud every now and again, he was so happy. I nodded to him, thinking about the way his shirt-and-letter looked strange, and then I was doing a Hollywood double-take at the big red J and the diagonal stripes of our colors.

THAT got me. I hate a four-flusher. I hate a guy to wear letters or colors he hasn't any right to. I started to go after him, shoving people aside to get there; and then someone was stopping me. It was Maryanne.

"Please, Willson? Don't say anything. I did you a favor once, with Tex. Remember? Now *you* do *yourself* a favor and let Spurgeon wear that shirt with the letter and the colors. I told him you wanted him to."

What got me was her taking so long to say all that. I mean, taking the trouble. I figured it showed how she cared for me. Because like I've said, Maryanne Sheldean's best arguments were not oral. "I don't get it," I said. "Do *myself* a favor?"

"Willson, Dad wants to see you," she said, smiling again.

That settled it. I was feeling bad about our showing, so I hurried over to laugh it off with Prexy if I could. But the big-domed, bald, bright-eyed man peered at me through his thick spectacles and—winked! While I stared, unbelieving my own eyes, he did it again.

"You clever scoundrel!" he smirked. "Ah, you clever scoundrel!" And he winked again. "Ho ho!"

I'm not the biggest fool ever. I winked back and said, "Ha ha!" And got away from there, quick, looking for Maryanne. But I couldn't find her.

"The ol' Prexy ain't got all his marbles," I figured, and let it go at that.

Then the shot-put came up, and I went out to see what Tex was doing, and I stiffened like a terrier when I saw Meatball fooling around, getting limbered up. This time, it was the YMCA coach who stopped me from grabbing the guy. Who did he think he was, competing for us without a word from me? Even if he would look funny against smooth competition, and that would amuse me, I didn't like that four-flushing thing of wearing our shirt.

Ducky Gleeson, The Y coach, came over and said:

"Say, Tiny, that was decent of you to

let Meatball score with our side. But he insisted on wearing the Jefferson colors so everyone would know he was your boy. Think he'll break the record?"

I sniffed, but I couldn't get anything on his breath.

"Oh, sure! See those seats up there—at the top? I imagine he will put it right up there over that top row, and down into the car-parking space."

Ducky grinned. "You always were a great kiddier. Saving him for the I-C-4-A's huh? Pretty smooth."

Ducky went away, and I stood there trying to make it all out, and then I just stood there. Looking. Meatball hefted the 16-pound shot in his left hand, stepped around inside the circle a minute, like a nervous cat looking for a place to lie down, and then he went into a pose that should have been put in marble, for form.

When he swung that big left leg out a bit, balanced the shot behind his head, and skipped forward that way like a faun, I nearly swallowed my cigar. The shot rose, traveled, dipped, fell with a thunk. Still I didn't move. The measurers checked it, called out:

"Fifty-two feet, eleven inches!"

I just stood there.

Tex gave me a wounded look, flushed, and tried to hurl the shot out of the field. He came apart in his effort, and he didn't make fifty feet. Then Meatball was in again, was showing that form in action.

Heft, swing, skip-skip-step-twist. Thunk!

"Fifty-six feet, two inches," the measurer called back. "Within eleven inches of the world's record!"

I hid in the crowd, away from the reporters, while the hammer throw—the sixteen-pounder—got under way, and when Meatball flashed the weight one hundred and eighty-one feet, I looked for a hole to crawl into. Only eight feet under the American record set by Pat Ryan back in 1913!

BUT the newshounds got to Meatball so I came out to hear him talk.

"I owe it all to my coach, Pop Biggers," Meatball said, his eyes shining and his teeth flashing in a grin. "I wanted to come out for the team, but he wouldn't let me. He kept reminding me what I was in Jefferson College for. To study. To make my mark, as he said.

So he suggested I work out at the Y, when I could, and nearly every night he gave me talks on how to put the shot, how to throw the hammer, how to hurl the javelin."

I hate a four-flusher—but there are times when it is best to keep your mouth shut, and that went for my mouth, right then. The reporters said it was a terrific story, and they said I had the Decathlon champ in Meatball, because he was amazingly fast for a big man. And then Prexy was there, having his say.

"Greatest bit of coaching I have ever seen," he said. "Wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, on my own front porch. Why, Coach Biggers even had me explain to Spurgeon Leonidas the scientific equations involved in the passage of a rounded object through the air, with, of course, proper and sober thought given to trajectory, impetus, and the like. Ah, yes, the board shall hear of this. And what generosity, lending him to the YMCA so the townsmen could win a meet!"

I heard, in a daze, Meatball give the rest of it to the press.

"Yes, I owe it all to Coach Biggers. However, my father was Xenophon Leonidas, Greek champion at weights and the shot, and so I suppose you might say I come by it naturally. Also, Coach Biggers introduced me to the girl I am going to marry, when my academic work is completed. Miss Maryanne Sheldean."

Maryanne, who by now was standing alongside me, looked up at me and dusted me with an especially soot-dirty sweep of her lashes.

"There is no limit to Coach Biggers' generosity with his athletes," she crooned. "You might say, he has what it takes. To be a great track coach, that is." Then she smiled sweetly. "Pop, dear? Will you pose with me for the picture they are taking? Spurgeon is not dressed for the occasion."

That's how come I got in that *Lamp-lighter* picture with Maryanne, when she announced her engagement to Meatball. I looked around, while they were getting the angle right, and I saw Tex Souder standing there, laughing and laughing.

I knew then that it was going to be all right with my track team. I knew then that I could count on Tex for his best, without any temperamental difficulties any more. So I laughed, too.

Yeah, I got what it takes, I guess.

THRILLS IN SPORTS

By JACK KOFOED

FAMOUS SPORTS COMMENTATOR

A ROOKIE PITCHER GETS INTO A TIGHT SPOT IN VENEZUELA

EDDIE CHANDLER, the Brooklyn rookie pitcher, is a pretty good hand on the mound, and may turn out to be a star sooner or later. But, it's a cinch he will never have an experience in a big league ball park like the one he had in Venezuela.

Eddie went to that country to play winter ball. He liked the setup, and was making money and having fun when he received a wire from Branch Rickey. The telegram told him he would be subject to suspension if he played after the first of March.

"Okay," said Chandler. After all, the big league was his ambition, and this Venezuela stuff was only a winter sideline. So, he showed the wire to the manager of the club for which he was working.

"The people here like you beeg," said the boss. "Put on the uniform. Then, they know you are here, anyway."

So, Eddie sat on the bench, and watched the game. Along about the seventh inning his team's pitching began to fall apart at the seams, and the opposition pushed over several runs. The fans began yelling for Chandler to get in there, and stop the slaughter.

"You peetch, Eddie," ordered the manager.

"Look," said Chandler. "You saw the telegram. This is after the first of March. If I throw one ball I'm likely to be set down, and not allowed to play with Brooklyn."

"You peetch!" thundered the manager, black browed with anger.

"Nuts!" said Mr. Chandler.

The manager didn't fuss. He called several policemen, and they rushed Eddie Chandler out of the ball park, into a car, and down to the police station. There he sat and waited.

"What can they do to me?" Eddie wondered. "Maybe it's a crime here not to obey a baseball manager. Maybe they'll make treason out of it, and have me shot."

He didn't believe it, but he was getting pretty nervous about it. He had never been



in jail before, and he didn't like the experience. Finally another copper came in.

"You are lucky, senior," he said. "We ween the ball game. If we lose, we keep you here until you have a long, white beard. Next time you better peetch, and give no oggements."

Chandler figured he was pretty lucky. They only fined him \$35 . . . though he has yet to find out why. But, you can bet all the peaches in Georgia that Eddie will never play ball in Venezuela again. He figures that next time they might make it a jail sentence, or a firing squad.

JOCKEY BLACK REALLY RACED FOR THIS TROPHY!

BOBBOY BLACK is what is known in England as a "gentleman rider." He appears as a jockey in steeplechase events, and on the flat, but accepts no pay. It is all sport to him.

Black's great ambition for years was to win the Cheltenham Gold Cup, one of the prize events of the turf. Bob had a very good mount named Fortina, and no man was happier at the thought of the coming race.

The rider's home was not far from Cheltenham, so when he jumped into his car, he considered he had plenty of time to get to the track. But, there are comparatively few



automobiles in England, and most of them are pretty well beaten up. When Chandler was four miles from where Fortina was waiting in his barn, the car broke down.

Black waited for a few minutes, hoping another would come along. None did. There are few service stations and mechanics along the English roads . . . So Bobby decided to run for it. Four miles is quite a gallop for

a man who has been used to riding in automobiles or on the backs of horses, but off he went at a fast jog. His heart was in his throat, because he couldn't bear the thought that he would arrive too late. In that case someone else would have the leg up on Fortina.

By the end of the first mile, Black was puffing a little. At the end of the second he was panting. By the time he had put three behind him, he felt as though he couldn't go another yard. But, he must do it. He had to ride Fortina!

Bobby Black made it just in time. He almost fell into the tack room, and climbed into his riding clothes. The boy was still trembling with near exhaustion when he was boosted into Fortina's saddle.

After such a heroic effort, it might be expected that his mount would be beaten. That's the way things usually turn out. Instead, the thoroughbred went into the lead at the start, and won going away without the least trouble.

Young Mr. Black grinned when they placed the Cheltenham Gold Cup in his arms to be photographed in the winner's circle.

"There's only one thing I have to say, gentlemen," he told his audience. "I ran farther than Fortina did to win this trophy!"

BILLY MULDOON PITS HIMSELF AGAINST THE KANSAS DEMON

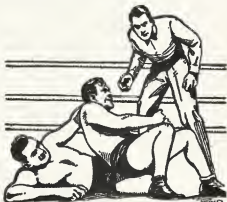
IN THE old days wrestling was a savage business, and one of its greatest exponents was a burly lad named William Muldoon. He had started while serving as an infantryman in the Civil War . . . added to his experience while fighting with the French against the Germans in 1870 . . . and then as a patrolman in New York City. Then, he decided he should gain financial rewards for his efforts. He came to grips with athletes in the backrooms of such noted taverns as Harry Hills' at Houston and Crosby Streets; at Owney Geohagan's "Bastille" on the Bowery, and the Allen's "Bal Mabilie" on Bleecker Street. Then, Billy won the Graeco-Roman championships from Thebaud Bauer.

It was inevitable that Muldoon should eventually be matched with Clarence Whistler, "The Kansas Demon," at the Terrace Garden Theatre. The terms of the match were that, if no fall had been gained by the end of the first hour, the men were to be given ten minutes rest at the end of each succeeding hour.

Probably Billy Muldoon was the only man in New York who believed the hitherto unbeaten Whistler could be whipped. He was

as cocky as he was strong, and conceded that no man was his superior.

At the end of the first hour there had been no fall, but Whistler seemed the faster and more agile performer. Certainly, he impressed the spectators, for they made him a favorite in the betting. By the end of four hours, though, neither man had been able



to pin the other, and they were getting a bit weary.

Finding himself unable to pin his adver-

sary, Whistler, at the start of the fifth hour, began boring with the top of his head at Muldoon's body just below the neck, grinding Billy's face into the canvas. Once Clarence caught his opponent in a combination arm and neck clamp, and when Muldoon squeezed out of that, Whistler forced him into a torturing headlock.

At the start of the sixth hour, the Kansan came out with his hair saturated with ammonia. He rubbed it in his enemy's face and against the open wound on Billy's neck until Muldoon was in an agony of pain. However, he was dishing out punishment of his own, and Whistler's left ear was almost torn off from pulling out of headlocks.

It must have been around four o'clock in the morning when the theatre proprietor, not seeing any end to this titanic struggle, turned out the gas lights. Everyone went to the bar-room to discuss finding a place where the match could be continued. Neither man wanted a draw decision, though they had been struggling for nine hours and a half . . . but the bartender, like the theatre owner, turned out the lights, and there was nothing to do but call things off.

There never have been two more equally

matched men than William Muldoon and Clarence Whistler. They met again, this time in San Francisco, and again the match was a draw. Their third meeting in the same city was productive of a strange twist. Muldoon had been warned that a gang of thugs, led by Ned Burns, had bet on Whistler, and would do everything they could to see that victory was theirs.

Billy won the first fall in six minutes. When they came into the ring for the second, they grappled near the ropes, and rolled into the crowd. The toughs crowded around. One of them kicked Muldoon in the right eye, completely closing it. Back in action once more, Billy picked up his rival and dashed him to the floor. Whistler's collar bone was broken, and his left arm hung down to his knee.

Billy, always a sportsman, offered Clarence one thousand dollars to relinquish the match, but the gamester refused, and the referee, against all rules and regulations, called it a draw. Though he felt he had been robbed, Muldoon always admitted Whistler was just as good as he was . . . and when Billy Muldoon admitted anything like that he had to be very thoroughly convinced.

FRED CLARK TIES THE OUTFIELD ASSIST RECORD

IT HAS been thirty-seven years since Fred Clark tied an assist record for outfielders, but no one who saw him do it will ever forget. Clark was not only fast, and possessed of a rawhide whip, he was one of the smartest players in baseball.

On the afternoon of August 23, the Pirates and Phillies were tangled in a tight game in the Smoky City. The Phils of those days were sluggers, and though they never won a pennant, were always in the midst of the championship scramble with as much chance as anyone else.

In the second inning "Silent John" Titus was on third, with one out, and chunky Otto Knabe at bat. Knabe whacked a long fly to left field that Fred took on the dead run. The instant the ball smacked into his palms, Titus lit out for home. "Silent John" was no winged Mercury, but he wasn't the slowest fellow in baseball, either. But, Clark rifled a dead line throw into George Gibson's hand, and Gibson touched out Titus a foot from the plate.

In the fourth inning big "Kitty" Bransfield was on first base. Mike Doolan slapped a vicious single into left. Clark, racing over as fast as he could, barely grabbed it on the third bounce. Bransfield rounded second at

top speed, and poured on the gas as he raced for the hot corner. Even though he was off balance, Fred made a perfect throw that caught Kitty as he slid into the sack.

In the sixth inning Sherwood Nottingham Magee, one of the league's great batters,



hammered what looked to be a certain double into left. On the dead run, Clark grabbed it on the bounce, and made as marvelous a throw as has been seen on any diamond. It came low, on the proper side into Jack Miller's hands, and Miller touched out the angrily charging Magee.

The final assist was just one of those things. With Doolan on second, catcher

Pat Moran looped what seemed like a sure hit over Clark's head, but Fred went into the air, and made one of those improbable catches. Doolan, figuring it was a safety for sure, had already rounded third, and was heading for home.

The frantic shouts of the coach caused him to retrace his steps, and try to get back to second.

Hans Wagner had run onto the infield grass. He took Clark's throw, and relayed it to Miller in time to catch Doolan by several

yards. The outfield assist record was tied.

The first outfielder to make four assists was "Dusty" Miller, of Philadelphia on May 30, 1895, and against the Phillies, too. His feat was remarkable, though less spectacular than Clark's. Right field at the old Phillies park was quite short, and part of an overflow crowd helped make it shorter than ever. No less than four Phils whacked short singles into right . . . at least they looked like singles . . . and Miller threw them all out at first base!

JIMMY DYKES DRESSES THE WHITE SOX UP AS FIREMEN

JIMMY DYKES is one of the great baseball "jockies" . . . a jockey being a man who loves to rib the opposition, and upset it with jibes and jests. The little round man, who now manages the Hollywood Stars of the Pacific Coast League, was at his ram-bunctious best when he directed the Chicago White Sox.

Dykes loved to ride the stars. Sometimes he would ease up on a youngster, trying to make good on the big time, but never when it came to a high salaried, widely ballyhooed ace. One of his favorite targets was "the Splendid Splinter," Ted Williams.

There were times when the home-run thumping outfielder became discouraged with pay or conditions. Once he even threatened to quit baseball, and become a fireman. Jimmy seized upon that episode with hilarious glee.

When the Red Sox came to the Windy City, Dykes borrowed helmets, raincoats and boots from the local smoke eaters, and had several of his men don these habiliments. Then, at the top of his raucous voice, Jimmy called Williams' attention to the costumes.

The umpires furiously demanded that the uniforms be discarded, but Dykes refused.

"There is nothing in the rule book," he shouted, "that says, if my boys want to play fireman, they can't do it. Yoo-hoo, Ted."



You'd look better in one of these outfits than the monkey suit you're wearing."

The umpires couldn't do anything about it, and Williams became so angry at the ribbing he didn't do much hitting against the White Sox in that series.

BRADY ASPIRED TO SCRAP THE MANASSA MAULER

JIM BRADY was a husky boy in a little Jersey town, and nobody in that neck of the woods had ever licked him. He wanted to become a professional fighter. He had plenty of backers in that idea, for the folks thought he was a sure champion. He was so big and strong, and could hit so hard. Jack Dempsey was champion in those days, but the Jerseyite figured that, after two or three years, Jim would belt the Manassa Mauler out in a few rounds.

Brady was pretty high on that idea himself. None of the local boys had ever come close to beating him. He knocked them out as though they were children. Then, he fought a couple of professional bouts, and won them just as easily as he had the free-for-alls.

Those fights were in Philadelphia, and Philadelphia is a good fight town. They like sluggers, who can flatten the opposition, and Jim flattened them in spades. Yet, in spite

of his terrific punch, he was totally inexperienced, though he wouldn't admit that. Brady thought he was as good as anybody who ever laced on a pair of gloves.

So, promoters who are more interested in the box office than in the welfare of the boys who fight for them, put Jim on with a fellow who had come along pretty well, and had been in action for five or six years. He knew all the answers Slimmer hadn't found out yet. I've forgotten his name at the moment . . . it has been so long ago . . . but he was a pretty smart and tough hombre. Let's call him "Cowboy" Thomas.

The Cowboy wasn't a champion, and by this time he knew he never would be. He was just in there for the bucks. But, Jim Brady believed he would be a champion . . . and with the right breaks he might have become one. But, the break he got that night was the worst he could possibly have gotten.

The first round was fast and full of action, and Jim looked better than he had a right to look, considering how little experience he had. But, the second round was different, and it was dramatic, and sad.

Thomas, not wanting to trade punches with a slugger like Jim, fell back on his boxing skill. He jabbed and stepped around, and Brady began to miss, as he figured to miss against that kind of defense.

That angered the big Jerseyman. He bulled forward, lashing out with both big

fists. He found the target elusive and difficult to reach, but panting a little, Jim kept going. Once he had Thomas in a corner, but the Cowboy ducked out into the open. It was then that Brady wound up, and really threw his Sunday punch.

He missed . . . missed by a country mile . . . and pitched forward on his face, his



right leg twisting under him. The crowd laughed, and applauded ironically. The big stiff, Clumsy guy, wasn't he?

The Cowboy stepped back, expected Brady to rise, and continue his flailing attack, but Jim lay there. The referee bent down to look, and said, "My God!" in an awed voice.

The big fellow's leg was fractured, and the jagged bone stuck through the skin like an X. They carried him to the hospital, and eventually Jim walked again, but his athletic career was through. He never pulled on the gloves again.

Maybe the people in that little Jersey town were right. He might have been another Dempsey, but luck decreed that he never should have the chance to prove it.

A BILLIARD GAME WITH \$15,000 IN STAKES!

W E TALK of big money in these days, but do you ever hear of a billiard game in these days for a stake of \$15,000 and the championship?

That is what happened on the night of April 12, 1859, when Michael Phelan, of New

York, played John Seereiter at Fireman's Hall in Detroit.

More than \$50,000 was bet by the spectators on the game, which was for 2,000 points, and lasted nine hours. Phelan won, 2,000 to 1,904.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT—THIS ACTUALLY HAPPENED

D ID you ever hear of a double play that occurred without a defensive ball player touching the ball?

It happened, though, whether you believe it or not.

The Athletics and Browns were playing one afternoon in the long ago. The St. Louis catcher, John Clements, was on third and shortstop Monte Cross on second. With

the count three and two on the hitter, both began running with the pitch. Cross, much the faster, was almost behind Clements when the batter rammed a vicious liner toward the hot corner.

The ball hit John, caromed off and struck Cross, too.

Both men were out, because they had been hit by a batted ball.

BIG LEAGUE BUSHYER

By JOHN WILSON

Rookie Perk Prather looked like the answer to a manager's dream, but Big Moose Jordan did not realize that the dream was really a nightmare until it was just a bit too late!

CHAPTER I

The Accomplished Rookie



ONCE "Big Moose" Jordan had been a big leaguer. A pretty good one, too, because after so many seasons in the minors, they still recalled his handling of the key-

stone sack. They remembered the big, black bat he lugged to the plate, and how he pounded a succession of base knocks when the dog days of the pennant scramble set in. For if ever there lived a money player, Big Moose Jordan was it.

His name belonged on top of the list of gashouse players. A driving and defiant player, he seldom yielded the jump to any man. So there was often trouble, and Big Moose was just as susceptible to an enemy as he was to a friend.

The years swept Big Moose aside, dimming his fame and knocking him into the bush leagues. A half dozen seasons ago, he had picked up his glove and taken it into the dugout. But as surely as the big league outfits hit the stretch drive, the old excitement awakened in Big Moose. Through these days, he stirred restlessly like an old fire horse. He lived in the warmth of old memories. There was little else that remained for Big Moose.

This day the swivel chair squeaked under Big Moose's restless maneuvering. He had spread the sports pages of the *Daily Messenger* on the desk which stood in a corner of the dingy office. The eminence of Big Moose's position rated the office, being manager of the Class C Rockets.

The knock sounded on the door, but Big Moose, immersed in an account of the doings of the big league Panthers, did not hear. It came again, louder. Big Moose grunted. It was hardly the procedure to knock when entering Big Moose's den.

"Come on in," Big Moose said irritably. "Nobody is holding you out there."

He did not look up from the newspaper. The footsteps came across the bare floor, stopping in front of the desk.

"It's a darn shame," Big Moose murmured more to himself than the visitor, "the Panthers blowing a six game lead. It used to be the other club that did the cracking. But that's how it goes when you got a flock of rookies in the line-up. They look great all season and then the old fever gets 'em and they bust wide open."

"Yes," came the retort. "The lump comes up in the best of them, I guess."

BIG MOOSE jerked his head up from the newsprint. He detected a suggestion of harshness in the voice.

"I don't mean that they turn color," he snapped. "They're in there punching but they're tighter than a drumstick. It's a funny thing, that pennant fever."

"Not so funny sometimes."

Big Moose tightened his stare on the tall, rangy kid, across the desk. He was twenty years, maybe. The features were strong and sharply defined, and his eyes held a hardness that seemed out of place in his young face.

"What's on your mind, fella?"

"A job playing shortstop."

Just like that.

Big Moose laughed. There was something about this kid's directness that he liked. But it was a little late in the season even to think of a green kid at shortstop.

*A Baseball
Novelet*



Perk shifted his feet
and whacked it down
the left field line

"You don't have to be so grim about it, kid," he said in a more kindly tone. "But there's nothing doing now. Next spring, maybe."

"I'm a better ball player than the guy you got playing short."

Big Moose stood up, grinning. "Cocky, ain'tcha? Well, that's the way I like my ball players—providing they can live up to their talk on the field."

"But you haven't got a job for me?"

"No."

The kid looked straight at Big Moose, staring into his face. Then his voice came in a slow, measured beat.

"Chip told me to look you up when I got home. We both played on the same Air Corps outfit."

Big Moose paled. The old dull pain began to throb in him. It was like a spike wound around his heart, losing Chip, his only son, in the war. Chip was a kid himself, barely nineteen, and Big Moose had lived for the day when Chip would be holding down the keystone on his old club, the Panthers.

Somehow, Big Moose had never allowed himself to believe that Chip was dead. Just missing. But the details were filled in when the war ended. When the B-24 was shot from under him, Chip had parachuted. He stood on the ground, fighting it out and taking eight Japs with him. A money player, too, Chip.

"You must be a pretty good ball player," Big Moose said slowly. "Chip wouldn't give his old man a wrong steer. What's your name?"

"Perk Prather."

Big Moose was silent a moment, feeling an odd familiarity about the name. It touched an old chord in his mind but he quickly put the thought aside. More than likely, Chip had mentioned Perk Prather in one of his letters. That was back when Big Moose still carried his weight, and the crowd's thunder lingered around his fame.

They always said Big Moose could put his feet on the top drawer of the Panther organization. There'd always be a notch for Big Moose, sure. Talk, and that cheap, too. A couple of seasons boning up on the trade of skipping a team, and when the spot developed he'd be managing the Panthers. It was more than a couple of seasons. The Panthers changed ownership. The drifting started then.

And because money had meant no

more than the fun it could buy, Big Moose's bank account consisted of a stack of cancelled checks and a lot of laughs. He had touched all the bases on the way down and the trail had to end somewhere. At times, Big Moose thought the fire had gone out of him, the day he learned about Chip. And he was right.

"This is no bargain you're asking for," Big Moose said earnestly. "You get old fast unless you got the stuff and can move up in a hurry. The pay is lousy and it takes a tough hide to get along. Anyway, you come out to the ball park this afternoon, and we'll see what makes."

"Don't worry about me being able to take it," Perk Prather said evenly. "I'm pretty good at handing it out, too."

"I hope so for your sake," Big Moose said quietly.

When Perk Prather turned his back, striding from the room, Big Moose folded the newspaper on his desk. He leaned back in the chair, his thoughts dipping into the past and the hopes he'd had for young Chip. Giving Chip's buddy a hand was the least he could do.

There remained more than a month of the Central League season. The Rockets were rolling along at a fourth place clip and apparently going nowhere. The gap, however, between the first and fourth place clubs was not so wide that a solid winning streak could not put the Rockets on top.

Big Moose in his second season of piloting the Rockets was sharply aware that the glitter of his old fame had worn thin with the fans. They'd been riding him hard and relentlessly. Either he'd give them a winner this time or get out.

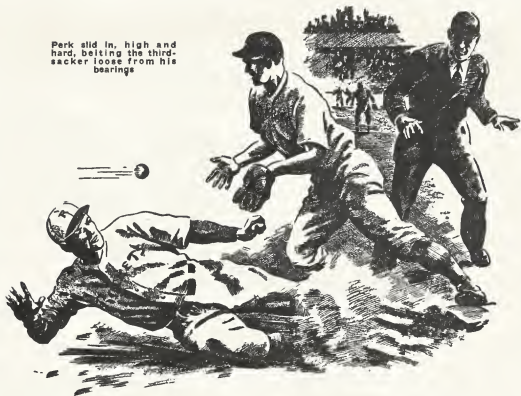
IT WAS Saturday and the crowd was large and noisy. Big Moose walked onto the field, and the hiss of voices broke around him. Big Moose laughed bitterly. He'd lost plenty along this backwoods trail but still retained enough pride to resent the flow of insults pouring down on him. There was enough of the old Moose left to make his blood boil.

A loud, booming voice flung its sarcasm at Big Moose.

"Oh, you has-been. Dance and I'll throw you a coin."

Big Moose recognized the voice, and knew the spot from which it came. The guy had been riding him steadily, using

Perk slid in, high and hard, belting the third-sacker loose from his bearings



a foul and vicious tongue. The jibes came harder, more persistent, and the angry knot crowding up inside of Big Moose by-passed reason.

He started toward the barrier, fists ready. Then a sudden, steely grip tightened on his arm.

"You'd be crazy to do that. Those guys would just love you to go up there."

Big Moose turned, feeling the tension drain away. He looked at Perk Prather.

"And I told you about needing a tough hide," he said slowly. "Okay, fella, I'm willing to listen."

Perk Prather's hand dropped to his side. There was neither relief in his face nor apology. Big Moose saw the tiny grin lurking in the corner of Perk's mouth and momentarily it puzzled him.

Big Moose strode into the dugout, the jeers bursting around him. Relax, he thought. You're letting things get under your skin that shouldn't even touch you. Sure, they're squawking and that's fair enough, considering the bum job you've turned in.

He propped a foot on the top dugout step, watching the Rocket hitters take their pre-game swatting drill. It was a kind of subconscious game he played

with himself, analyzing the worth and future of each man stepping up to the plate.

There was Punch Kyle, the second sacker. Punch had been around a long time, climbing into the majors and bouncing back hard. He was steady afiel but a light hitter, and in the gloaming of his career. Roy Pack was the shortstop, and resigned to Class C baseball. He took all day going to his left on ground balls and was a sucker for a high, inside hook. There was Hub Martineck, a young, hard-hitting outfielder, scheduled in Big Moose's book to go places in baseball. The Rockets were a collection of veterans, hearing the ump's last call, and rookies beginning to feel their oats.

The ring of a sharply tagged ball turned Moose's head in the direction of right field. The leather was traveling on a swift, high level. It caromed off the fence. Big Moose's stare settled on Perk Prather, standing deep in the rectangle and hitting from the portside. Perk set himself solidly and seemed loose and slack-muscled.

The pitch came in again and the ash whirled around evenly, riding the pellet

straight away into center. He leaned into the next heave, busting a shot over the right field fence. The guy stood in there and sprayed a dirge of ringing base smashes to all sections of the field that brought a howl from the stands. When Perk returned to the dugout, Big Moose said:

"Where'd you play ball before?"

"I told you, the Army Air Corps team."

"And before that?"

"Semi-pro stuff. I played another season of it before coming here."

He was a youngster and, barring his couple of years in the army, couldn't have been around much. There was no reason to lie.

Later, Big Moose stuck him in with the regular infield during the practice session. He seemed to have surprising confidence and poise. He looked smooth and natural in the short slot, handling everything that came his way with a nice finesse.

Big Moose, glancing toward the rail where the owner of the Rockets sat, noticed the pleased expression on his face. Arthur Marlowe also owned a slice of the town's real estate and the local movie houses. He was a big fish in a small town and fancied himself to be a baseball strategist. A few minutes before the game with the Barons got underway, he beckoned to Big Moose.

"I'd like to see that young man in action," he said, jabbing a finger toward Perk.

"I'll try and use him," Big Moose said. "But he's green and it might be better to wait till one of the other clubs come in."

"Today is as good a day as any."

CHAPTER II

Dissension

THE Rockets were playing the Barons who were sitting on the top rung of the circuit. The first two games of the series had gone to the Barons, and Big Moose was hoping to salvage the remaining contest.

He handed the hurling assignment to Farmer Jones, a tricky and mean southpaw on occasions. However, this did not turn out to be one of those occasions.

The Barons handed Farmer Jones back to Big Moose in the fourth inning, whacking him solidly and scoring four times.

Big Moose trudged to the mound, carrying Farmer's walking papers. The noise came out of the stands, ripe and mocking. It hurt. But the Rockets faltering badly made Big Moose a natural target. The guy of the booming voice let loose another volley, edged in blue-border. Then added:

"What's the matter with that new bum you've got? Put him in there."

Perk had given them that eye-ful during the pre-game prelims and it stuck in the minds of the fans. Four runs behind, they took up the cry for Perk, clamoring for a new interest.

Big Moose looked at Perk, sitting in the shadows of the dugout. That tiny grin wedged in the corner of Perk's mouth almost gave the impression that he enjoyed Moose's verbal walloping. While the relief hurler was warming his flipper, the Rocket owner motioned Moose to the rail.

"Put that new youngster in," he said bluntly. "Give the fans what they want."

A protest formed on Big Moose's lips. But he shook it off. When you're trying to hold onto a grub ticket, you swallow pride and let things ride. That's the penalty of a has-been.

The Barons slashed the fifth tally of the inning across before the reliever put the stopper to the run making.

The Rocket lead-off in the last of the fourth rapped a meager grounder back to the mound. One down. Lefty Dennis, the first baseman, got the initial Rocket safety, rifling a two-bagger down the right field line. The next batter went up there, and Roy Pack started toward the on-deck circle.

"I'm gonna let the kid hit for you."

The veteran short smiled wanly. "He looked good out there, Moose."

Moose nodded.

The pathos of seeing a man struggling against the tide to stay in the game sickened Big Moose. He was in the same swim himself but that did not remove the dread of seeing another man go down for the count. He knew the shortstop was worrying about being dropped from the payroll and that family woes increased that worry.

The hitter hoisted into center and two men were away. Perk Prather dug in at

the plate. The Baron moundsman had a nice quick breaking shot and plenty of hop on his fast one. He sized Perk up, and pegged the high, hard one, lashing the ball across the letters. Perk let it pass and the call was a strike.

A side-arm thrust and a hook dipped away from the flash of the yellow stick, Perk missing badly. Then a ball. On the next delivery, Perk slashed at the quickie curve that dove wide of the plate. He swung ingloriously and was down on strikes. The stands were quiet. Then:

"Hey, lemon-head, go on back to milking cows, ya bum!"

Moose walked out to Perk, half expecting to find gloom dripping from the guy's face. But he was wrong.

"I'll get him next time," Perk said evenly.

"Yeah, but you got to watch that dippy thing he throws."

Perk went out to play the shortstop slot. One away, the next Baron worked a free ticket. The Rocket reliefer worked himself into a three-two jam. He cut loose again. The base-runner whirled into motion. The hit and run. The batter banged a sizzling shot through the middle. It was cleanly through. That's what Moose thought till he saw Perk Prather come out of nowhere, expertly anticipating the smash. He fielded the pellet cleanly, shoveling to Punch Kyle. The keystoneer fired to first for the twin killing and a howling roar burst from the stands.

BIG Moose whistled softly, knowing that the kid's handling of the scorcher was big league stuff. That kind of split-second movement didn't simply happen. You had to be intuitively gifted to make such plays.

The Barons launched another base-hit barrage in the seventh. Two straight bingles put runners on first and third. A walk followed, loading the bags, and the Rocket infield crept in for a cut-off play at home. On a two strike count, the hitter lashed a shot to the left of the mound. Perk somehow got in front of it, making the pick-up and winging a submarine bullet into the plate. The peg was swiftly relayed to first and Perk had cooked up another double play.

The guy had the fans goggle-eyed with his fielding and they cheered him hoarsely. It didn't seem to matter much that the next Baron sticker walloped the

horsehide against the fence and the Rockets added three more runs to their total, going ahead, 7-1. The fans riveted their attention on Perk.

He came to bat again in the lower half of the seventh. Dink Chaney opened the frame, singling to center. A blooper fell in there and the fans were screaming for Perk to poke one.

Big Moose got a look at the kid's face and it was tight and grim, and a peculiar feeling passed through Big Moose. Maybe the war had done things to this kid. Maybe it had given him some sort of grudge against the world. But it wasn't pleasant, that look on his face.

The Baron hurler tried that quickie curve ball. But Perk was waiting and the ash exploded against the leather before it snapped. The ball went streaking toward the right-center fence. It hit the top, ricocheted, and bounced off the fielder's glove.

Perk tore around the bases, setting sail for third. The peg rifled toward the bag. The ump hunched over the play. Perk slid in, high and hard, belting the Baron third-sacker loose from his bearings. The ball squirted loose, rolling in the dust, and Perk was in there.

The fans howled and so did the Barons. They surged toward third and a battle royal almost flared on the spot. But nothing more than a torrid exchange of words happened. Perk crossed the plate a moment later on a lazy hoist into center.

"That's the old gashouse style!" Moose bellowed. "Spill 'em on their backs!" He grinned wryly. "But you got to expect the same kind of treatment."

Perk looked at Moose but said nothing.

The Barons copped the game, 7-3. But as far as the fans were concerned, it was strictly a one man show. Perk slapped a double his next trip, and fielded his position sensationally.

Big Moose settled behind his desk after the game. He had every reason to feel elated about Perk's performance in spite of the loss of the game. Somehow, he did not, knowing that it meant the bench for Roy Pack and maybe the finish. Nor could he shake the premonition that under Perk's grim mask was something ominous and awful.

The door swung open and Arthur Marlowe came in.

"Well," the Rocket owner said, "we've

got quite a shorstop in this Perk Prather."

"He handles himself good," Big Moose said.

"Of course, you're planning to use him regularly. There hardly seems to be a comparison between him and Roy Pack."

Big Moose caught the scent then. The Rocket owner had on other occasions spoken about getting rid of Roy Pack. But Big Moose had kept the veteran shorstop on, knowing that illness in his family bore down heavily on him.

"We'll have a better line on Prather later," Big Moose said cautiously. "One game doesn't mean too much."

"Bosh. Anyone can see that Prather is the type of player the Rockets need. I think we can get along without Roy Pack now."

Big Moose swallowed hard. "Even if the kid holds the pace we'd still need a handy guy like Pack around. He's a good utility guy."

MARLOWE waved his hand dissentingly. "Pack is finished. You will tell him that his release is waiting."

"Look," Big Moose said, "I happen to know that Pack's got a sick kid and losing his job will be an awful blow. He's been with the club three seasons so why not let him stay on till the end of the season."

"I'm sorry about his personal troubles," Marlowe said, "but the matter is closed."

That was the last word. Big Moose slouched wearily in his chair. Then he called Roy Pack into the office and broke the news of his release. The shorstop accepted the news almost with the relief of a man who had know for some time of his doom.

The fact that the veteran grinned, trying to hide the pain of the blow behind the grin, was ironic. Maybe the guy had lost his stuff on the diamond, but he was still a big leaguer in courage and heart.

"I tried for you, Roy," Big Moose said. "But it was no dice."

He reached into his pocket, extracting his wallet. Moose knew he couldn't simply hand the shorstop charity dough without grinding the guy's pride. Big Moose replaced the wallet and only a few small bills remained. In his time, the dough had rolled off his palm easily. What was a few bucks now?

"It's from the old man, Roy," Moose

told him. "He said to give it to you."

He hoped Roy Pack believed him.

Then Big Moose scrawled a note to Spike Howell, an old pal managing a semi-pro outfit. He was confident that Roy Pack would shortly be playing ball again.

BIG MOOSE leaned back, staring unseeingly into space, and a wave of bitterness engulfed him. It had taken a long time to realize that that he was not cut of the right cloth to be a manager. He had always been a rough, rollicking guy on the diamond but that was a cover-up for the real softness underneath. Big Moose felt very tired.

Almost overnight, Perk Prather became the sensation of the league. He fielded like a million, ran the bases hard, and his powerhouse slugging made him top man in the hearts of the fans. It was obvious to Big Moose that in this Class C ball the kid was pegged a couple of notches below par.

Even with the inserting of Perk's one-man attack in the line-up, the Rockets failed to respond to the spurt that might be expected. Oddly, Perk seemed to do his best clubbing when the score was against the Rockets. In defeat, he was often brilliant. The box scores, however, showed that he seldom contributed much toward the winning games. Big Moose could not quite figure that one out.

What worried Big Moose more than this oddity, was the attitude of the other players toward Perk. He was an unpopular member of the team. Perk hardly mixed with the other men, and he possessed the unforgivable trait of leveling criticism at his teammates.

The seemingly hopeless plight of the Rockets threw the shining light harder on Perk. He was the idol of the fans and received numerous invitations to town shindigs, and these affairs Perk attended almost religiously. Nor was it any secret that Perk stood in pretty thick with Arthur Marlowe. These circumstances fanned the resentment of the players and the feud wavered on and finally broke into the open when the second place Colonels came in for a series.

For six innings, the teams were locked in a bitter and scoreless deadlock. A sweep of the three game series meant that the Rockets could move into third place and seriously threaten the grip

of the Colonels on the runner-up spot.

In the top of the seventh, the first Colonel batter slashed a hopper into the hole between short and third. Dib Briscoe, the third-sacker, moved deep and to his left to make the play. He hardly figured on Perk cutting in front of him. It was a pretty backhanded stab of the pellet Perk made. Off balance, he let loose the long, diagonal throw. It lacked the necessary speed to nip the base runner.

BIG MOOSE watched Dib Briscoe walk over to Perk, say something behind his glove. Whatever Dib said, he got it thrown right back in his face in the exchange of words that followed. The third sacker stalked back to his position, glaring at Perk, and scuffing the dirt angrily with his spikes.

That play Perk had pulled was another instance of the young shortstop looking good and yet the team gaining nothing. Muzz Delaney, on the hill for the Rockets, worked carefully on the number two Baron, finally getting him on a dinky infield hoist. One away, the hitter lashed a grounder behind second. Perk dug it up, looping the ball to second. Punch Kyle tried to pick the throw off his shoestrings and fumbled it a split second. The umpire gave the safe sign.

Muzz Delaney kicked the dirt around the mound and said bitter things to himself. His control wobbled, and he walked the next man, filling the hassocks.

He sunk deeper into the hole, twice in succession missing the plate. He ripped a hook in there, and the hitter looking for a fat pitch, swung mightily. A high hopper on the third base side of the mound sent Muzz leaping. He snagged the leather, his body twisting in the direction of second. No chance for a play at home. He rifled a hurried peg to Perk, covering the bag.

The throw was wild, kicking off the fingertips of Perk's glove. Backing up the play, Punch Kyle made the stop. Another run, however, scampered home and the Colonels had seized a 2-0 lead.

A moment later, Perk grabbed a torrid smash, flipped to Punch Kyle to double the runner off second and close out the frame.

Dib Briscoe stomped into the dugout, his eyes hot and angry. He jabbed a warning finger at Perk.

"Look, fella, I'll handle the traffic on my side of the diamond. Don't go fancy on me."

Perk laughed. "You were moving like a slow freight. Maybe five years ago you'd have made that play. But not now, brother."

Dib Briscoe started toward him. But Big Moose moved in then, grabbing the third-sacker.

"Lay off, Dib," he said. "He's still a kid and there's things he's got to learn."

"Yeah, to keep his big mouth shut for one thing," Briscoe said hotly. "That is only one of a long list."

Briscoe crouched down on the bench, muttering to himself. There wasn't much doubt in Big Moose's mind that the whole bench had been pulling for Briscoe to hang a shot on Perk's chin. Moose decided he'd try and talk some sense into Perk after the game.

Big Moose sent another man to the coaching line, wanting to be certain that the sparks flying around did not ignite into some real trouble. Punch Kyle sat down alongside of him.

"I know this sounds like a lot of cry-babyin'," Punch murmured, "but the guy is trying to make bums out of all of us. No school kid is going to do that to me. I've been watching Prather, and he doesn't give a hoot nor holler whether the team wins or loses."

"You're imagining things, Punch," Big Moose said. "The kid's shelling out more than his quota of base knocks."

The second baseman shook his head. "You see those plays he made last inning? He looked wonderful on every one of them. But me and Briscoe looked like bums. I don't think there's any accident about it. That guy is putting the screws to the team."

"Get rid of those ideas, Punch," Big Moose said. "They don't make sense."

But even as he said that, doubts assailed Big Moose and he wondered if he wasn't going too much overboard for Perk.

CHAPTER III

Greasing the Skids

IN THE eighth, Perk ridiculed Moose's doubts. He put the blast on a fast ball, driving a four-master. The game, how-

ever, went to the Colonels, 2-1.

Big Moose waited in his office for Perk to finish showering and dressing. It had been another day of jeers and disappointment. The newspaper on his desk ran a scorching story, pinning the blame on him for the shoddy season of the Rockets. The story said Big Moose wasn't likely to be around the following season which seemed the most hopeful prospect the fans had to look forward to. Big Moose went out and got Perk.

"I'm going to give it to you straight, kid," Big Moose said. "You know how the guys feel about you. Maybe they're just acting like a bunch of soreheads. I dunno. But you ain't helping things, lugging that chip on your shoulder. You got to realize some of those guys ranked with the best in their day. Don't push them around."

"There's nothing in my contract that says I have to fall all over a bunch of has-beens," Perk said. "I'm hitting that apple and that's the idea, isn't it?"

"Sure, sure, you're playing great ball," Big Moose said quickly. "But we're still not winning enough ball games. This bad feeling between you and the other men is knocking the innards out of the team."

The kid shrugged. "Let them think what they want about me. I won't be around here next season."

Big Moose felt his patience slipping away. "While you're playing for me, you'll do things my way. I'm getting a little tired of making excuses for you."

A voice from the doorway said: "What's this all about?"

Big Moose looked at Arthur Marlowe.

"Moose seems to think I'm ruining his team," Perk said.

"It seems peculiar that he should pick on the best ball player we've got," the Rocket owner said.

A slow anger crawled into Big Moose's face. "I figured I was doing Prather a favor, trying to set him straight about things. Apparently, I'm not allowed to criticize him."

"We'll consider the matter closed," Marlowe said briskly. He turned to Perk. "If you're ready, we'll get started. We've quite an evening ahead of us."

Big Moose sat there a long time after they'd gone, mulling over the situation. He was at a loss in trying to understand Perk's defiance. His hands were shackled and any attempt to discipline Perk

appeared futile in view of Marlowe's attitude.

He was more aware than ever that the young shortstop had a strange hidden dislike for him. Big Moose had sensed that the first day Perk stood before him but mistook the dislike for confidence. But Big Moose kept remembering that Perk had come to him on Chip's recommendation. And for that reason, he could not help but lean over backwards in Perk's favor.

It was nearly dawn of the next morning when Moose was awakened by a disturbance that came from the hotel corridor. There was some loud talking and Moose recognized Perk's voice. A moment later, a knock sounded on his door and Hub Martineck came in.

"Moose, your protege is kicking up a lot of mouth," the outfielder said. "You'd better come and get him before I put him to sleep with a haymaker. It won't take much more to tempt me, either."

Big Moose grabbed his robe and hustled across the hall. Martineck and Perk were roommates. One quick look at Perk was enough. The guy was bleary-eyed with drink and in a nasty mood. So this was the kind of evening Marlowe had given Perk.

"This little act will cost you," Moose said angrily. "I've been pushed around by some real men. But it's the first time a bush league rookie ever tried the stunt."

Perk stood back, gripping the bureau. A heavy scowl covered his face.

"The old man will knock your fines silly," he said scornfully. "You know you can't make 'em stick."

"Maybe he will," Big Moose said. "But he'll have to knock the job from under me to do it."

PERK laughed bitterly. "What's the matter, Moose? You used to be pretty slick at handing it out. But you don't look so good on the receiving end."

The fuse was burning in Big Moose and any moment, he knew, the explosion was going to come and it wouldn't be pretty.

"You're making a fool of yourself. I gave you a fair shake and now you're throwing the business at me. Be careful, fella."

There was a dead, tense silence. Perk leaned toward Big Moose and the words

lashed across his tongue.

"I've liked the show, Moose, watching you squirm while they're fixing your ride out of baseball. I loved it, seeing you go out there every day and take it on the chin, because I knew it was tearing your insides out. And they'll keep riding you every day till you quit, and I'll be laughing."

And Big Moose was thinking how the kid had riddled the team's spirit, stirred their wrath so that they were fighting him harder than the opposition. He recalled Punch Kyle's hunch that Perk was more interested in looking good out there than in the club winning ball games. And in making Punch Kyle and Dib Briscoe look bad on key plays, the Rockets had suffered accordingly in the league standings. That kind of stuff had torn into shreds whatever slim possibility remained of overtaking the top-notch Barons.

"Tell me the whole story, kid," Big Moose said and his voice shook a little.

"Dutch Prather," Perk said. "You remember him, Moose?"

Sure, Big Moose remembered. The name clicked in his mind and it was like a key springing open a rusty lock.

"So you're Dutch Prather's kid," Big Moose said softly.

It had happened fourteen years ago, during a crucial series between the Panthers and Robins. Dutch Prather was the Robin rookie third-sacker. Their feud had flared with the first exchange of flying spikes. Whereas Big Moose's feuds were generally enduring, he did not press things with Dutch. He merely noted that Dutch was a high-strung and sensitive guy and filed away this information for another day.

Big Moose went to work on Dutch, with the pennant riding on the outcome of the series. He rode him relentlessly, the way he himself often got it. Then Big Moose threw his big wallop, going into third base in the late innings of the first game. The ball had Moose beaten, but Dutch angered to a boiling point tried putting a hard tag on Moose. He didn't have a chance. Big Moose jolted him, jolted the ball loose. And while Dutch was groping to find his legs and the ball, Big Moose ran home, scoring the winning run.

The next day, the papers crucified Dutch, and everybody knew Big Moose had made a sucker out of the rookie.

The advantage belonged to Big Moose and he really poured it on Dutch in the second game. Dutch cracked wide open. He let an easy double-play grounder skip through his legs, opening the flood gates to the Panthers. He made three errors that game, and the Panthers routed the Robins. Dutch rode the bench in the final game but the damage had been done. The Panthers cleaned up the series and grabbed the pennant.

After the third game, Dutch Prather went back to his hotel room and took an overdose of sleeping pills.

They said Big Moose had jockeyed Dutch so ruthlessly that he was responsible for Dutch's act. They said a lot of things about Big Moose, and the spikes and fists flew at him in every city of the loop. The thought that he had driven Dutch into such a state of depression, bled Big Moose white, and dulled the fury of his play. Somehow, he stood up under the terrific punishment dealt him.

It was after the season closed that a sportswriter friend dug up the real low-down on Dutch Prather's suicide.

DUTCH, who was green and pliable and in the lower pay brackets of the Robins, had fallen in with some rough company. He had gone overboard for an easy dollar and had found himself up to his neck in debt. They'd had Dutch roped. His lone chance to pay-off was in the Robins copping the pennant and collecting a World Series check. This was the pressure that had busted Dutch, and what Big Moose contributed to his downfall was incidental alongside of it.

"But we can't print that," the newspaperman told Moose. "The guy has a wife and kid and it would only make a mess for them."

"I'm glad you're forgetting it," Big Moose said. "I can take care of myself. I'm not so certain they can."

Big Moose recalled all this now as he looked at Perk, the son of Dutch Prather. There was no anger in his voice.

"It's been quite a show for you, kid." Big Moose paused, his thoughts straying to his own son for a moment. "But I kind of wish you had left young Chip out of it. That knocked my guard down."

It was easy to understand the hardness in Perk's eyes now, and Big Moose wondered how it had fooled him for so

long.

"I didn't want you asking a lot of questions about me," Perk said. "I figured that mentioning Chip would eliminate that and dent the thing you call a heart. You see, I did play on the same Air Corps outfit with Chip. I learned a few things about you."

Some of the other Rocket players had crowded into the room, and they stared curiously at Big Moose and then at Perk, and they were puzzled at Big Moose's soft handling of the situation.

Big Moose turned to Hub Martineck. "Get him to bed, Hub."

He went back to his own room and sat on a chair and smoked cigarettes. Big Moose could not help thinking how peculiar a revenge Perk was exacting.

There was Perk's satisfaction of witnessing his final wash-up and finish in baseball. Perk could listen to the jeers rain down and watch him wiggle helplessly under Marlowe's heel, and finally see him fired and humiliated. And Perk could find solace in knowing that he had helped to bring about these circumstances. It was, Big Moose supposed, a kind of poetic justice in Perk's mind for the blow he believed Big Moose had dealt his father.

It was quiet in the dressing room the next day, a restraining quietness that found no outlet. Perk's grudge against Big Moose was thoroughly circulated among the Rockets. They knew Perk's version of the grudge, and because they were ignorant of the other, there was a strange understanding and sympathy for Perk.

Big Moose, who had shouldered grudges before, walked into the room and stopped alongside of Perk. He saw the lines grooved in Perk's face and knew he was hardly in condition to go out there and play ball.

"Go back to the hotel and get some sleep," Big Moose said.

He stood there a moment and watched the hatred flush into Perk's eyes. But the kid said nothing.

"It's time we win one and start going places," Big Moose said loudly then. "Let's give it a shake."

It was a poor attempt and the words fell flat. Somehow, though, it didn't seem to matter too much.

Big Moose went out there and caught the earful of jeers that mounted on all sides of him. The noise was more per-

sistent than ever, and he knew that it was due to his criticism of Perk's team spirit landing in the newspapers. That had been another lop-sided version of the real truth and there was little doubt in Big Moose's mind that Perk himself had handed the story to the papers.

HE STOOD on the coaching lines and hollered and tried to make it seem real. But the Rocket traffic on the base-paths was light and the holler stuck in Big Moose's throat. It was a miserable nine innings.

The Colonel clean-up socker cracked a four-master behind two runners in the fifth frame. They went to overwhelm three Rocket hurlers, winning handily, 9-3. And Big Moose knew it was hopeless, absorbing one defeat after another. He made up his mind that the time had come to resign. It was not an easy decision, because there was no other job awaiting him and no nest egg put aside.

The big, red-faced man was waiting in the hotel lobby for Big Moose. He looked twice the size of the tall, slender-hipped man who had stood on the firing line through so many seasons, and on whose great right wing the Panthers had roared to three consecutive pennants. But the grin was the same—wide and pleasant and unspoiled.

Big Moose took Fog Lawler's hand-clasp and the thought sprung in his mind that Fog was in town scouting Perk. That was Fog's job, knocking down the bushes for Panthers.

They chatted about old times, and there was much to say and recall, because Big Moose and Fog Lawler had been roommates while on the Panthers. They had rollicked together.

All during the conversation, Big Moose waited almost tensely for Fog to mention Perk's name. And when Fog finally did sound him out, even though Big Moose expected it, it jolted him.

"How 'bout this guy Perk Prather?" Fog asked. "He ought to be running for mayor, the way they talk him up around here."

Bang. There it was, the sixty-four dollar question.

I'm finished, Big Moose thought, but I can drag Perk along with me. All I need tell Fog is that the kid wasn't in the line-up because he went on a toot last night. Then ring in a few other

items, and his chances of moving up with the Panthers will be ruined for a long while.

CHAPTER IV

The Big Leaguer

BIG MOOSE laughed bitterly to himself because he knew he wasn't going to tell Fog Lawler any of those things. "He's laid up, Fog. Nothing serious. Missed the game today but you can get a look at him tomorrow."

"You think he's what I want, Moose?" Fog queried. "You'd be willing to stick your okay on him?"

"Exactly what you want. Plenty of field and a good boy with the wood."

It had come and gone, Big Moose's chance to square accounts with Perk for the wounds he had lanced open. Maybe it was an indirect debt Big Moose felt he owed the kid's old man. But he knew it was mostly because he had never belted a man when he wasn't looking. There was nothing noble or phony about it. Just the simple philosophy of giving a man a chance to swing for himself, and Big Moose had acted on that premise.

The stands were packed for that third game with the Colonels. The word had gotten around that Fog Lawler would be in the crowd, scouting Perk. The Rocket fans were obviously more interested in rooting Perk into a big league uniform than in the outcome of the game itself. There was much buzzing and pointing and cramming of necks in Fog Lawler's direction.

Big Moose knew the feeling. The long hope of the vets and youngsters on the field, hardly able to conceal their anxiety, wishing that the fates be kind to them this day. All of them hoping for the miracle that would rescue them from the outskirts of diamond oblivion. Big Moose, watching Perk closely, noticed the quick, nervous gestures and the sidelong glances at Fog Lawler. Big Moose felt the tension beginning to grip him, too.

The Colonels named their young southpaw star, Lin Ransom, to wrap up the series for them. Big Moose sent Farmer Jones to the mound, and the game got underway.

Farmer smelled the bacon. A bad arm had blighted what once had seemed a promising career. Farmer went from game to game, somehow hoping that overnight the old buzz ball would return. It was pitiful.

Sleepy Hooper, the Colonel lead-off, drilled Farmer's first pitch to right-center for two bases. There was no zip in Farmer's flipper. He tried to buzz the leather in there, but it merely waddled in and was slashed to the right of second base. Perk had consistently handled this type of play with a fine, easy motion. But not this time. The ball skipped cleanly into the outfield.

The kid is standing on a dime, Big Moose thought. He lost that extra step on the play and it got away from him. He's on the spot and the pressure has got him.

It was hot and heavy, that pressure on Perk. The guy knew Fog Lawler had his eyes glued on his every motion, and he was jittery under the stare. For him, it was the gateway out of the bushes, and he was strictly on his own. Big Moose was satisfied that Perk make or break himself in this manner. This was a fair test. But Perk could not let that kind of shot get away and still hope to make the grade.

The baserunner on second romped home. A man on first, the next batter dropped a bunt. It rolled toward the mound, and Farmer swooped down on it. Whirling, he threw to Perk racing to cover the bag. Perk gobbled the ball and let loose the relay to first base. The ball went six feet over the first sacker's head and the crowd moaned.

A rattling single followed, sending the Colonels ahead, 2-0. The scoring stopped there.

Big Moose had Perk hitting in the fourth slot, but he didn't make it to the platter in the first round. The young Colonel fireballer, wild in spots but remarkably steady when the count leaned against him, stifled the faintest suggestion of a base knock. The guy was chucking with one eye on Fog Lawler, and struck out the side.

THE Colonels went down in order in the second. Perk didn't handle a chance but the crowd cheered him on his way into the dugout. They were behind him solidly, whooping it up and letting Fog Lawler know what they thought of

their shortstop. It must have been a little embarrassing to Perk because he hadn't done a thing out there.

He stepped to the platter and the noise crackled loud and beseechingly. Big Moose strained forward a little. The Rocket fans were breathing hard, waiting for Perk to belt one so they could flood the park with sound.

On the mound, Lin Ransom uncoiled, side-arming a twister that slashed and kicked away from the flash of the Hickory. The left-hander wasted no time going into the motion again, pouring a speed ball through the slot. It caught a thin slice of the inside corner and was the second strike. Then a let-up pitch, soft and teasing and wide. Perk went down swinging—and looking bad.

Big Moose shook his head. The kid was a better ball player than he was showing. But he was going to pieces trying to do right by the crowd and Fog Lawler.

In the fourth inning, Perk was plenty shaky on a roller, but got the ball over to first in time for the putout. An inning later, he fumbled a smash straight at him, spoiling a double play but forcing the runner at second.

At bat, Lin Ransom poured the leather past his stick. Perk followed his strike-out with an infield loft his next trip.

The Rockets were runless. They came in for their licks in the lower half of the seventh. Big Moose saw Perk edge a glance at him, his face dark and solemn. Big Moose walked over to him.

"You're making a bum out of me, kid," Big Moose said softly. "I told Fog Lawler you're the guy he wants."

The look on Perk's face remained frozen. "That's hard to believe—you recommending me."

"Easy to prove, though. But right now, you've got to do some proving of your own. Fog wants to see things for himself."

Perk stared, puzzled. "I've hated the very air you breathe, but it's been no contest. You haven't even tried to fight back."

"That's right, I haven't. There's times when fightin' doesn't make much sense."

"You messed my father's chances in the big leagues," Perk said. "So you figure giving me a break smoothes all that?"

"I'm not giving you anything," Big Moose said evenly. "I simply think

you've got the stuff to go places. That's all."

The Colonel hurler was looking stronger as the game wore on. In the sixth, he whiffed Punch Kyle and got Dib Briscoe on a roller back to the box. The guy was grinning and as cocky as could be out there. He kept glancing in back of the Rocket dugout where Fog Lawler was sitting.

Two down, and Perk straddled the dish. The Colonel outfield shifted toward the right for this left-handed hitter. The crowd stirred, but much of the fire had gone out of their enthusiasm. It didn't take a scout's eyes to notice that Perk hadn't shown much all afternoon.

A strike whistled over the inside corner. Ransom whipped another fast one in, and Perk shifting his feet, whacked the leather down the left field line, the ball rolling to the fence. He got three bases against the over-shifted defense.

Hub Martineck belted to left-center and Perk scored on the two-base wallop. Then Dink Chaney caught one on the nose and on his one baser, Martineck crossed the plate, deadlocking the score at 2-all.

The next hitter went down on strikes. But the Colonel twirler was neither grinning nor strutting as he went in to the dugout.

The Colonels came quickly to life with a rally of their own in the seventh. The first hitter put the wood to a pitch, crashing it to right for two bases. Farmer Jones walked the next man, and Big Moose signalled a relief hurler to get ready. Two straight pitches fell outside the strike zone and Big Moose went out to the mound.

"I'm all right," Farmer said determinedly. "These bums can't hit me."

"Sure, sure," Big Moose said. "I leave you in and we all miss our supper."

"Lemme finish with this guy, Moose," Farmer said. "He's a soft touch."

An awful feeling bolted though Big Moose a moment later. Farmer threw a floater that fairly limped through the air. The hitter smashed it, driving a blazing shot down the middle.

SCOOTING to his left, Perk half dived for the pellet, his gloved hand stabbing and nailing the leather on the bounce. He flipped the ball into Punch Kyle's taloned mitt. Punch sent it on

to Lefty Dennis for a hairline double play.

The side went down on a hoist into center.

Big Moose leaned back on the bench and felt a great, compressing pressure lift from him. One dazzling play, perhaps, didn't carry too much weight. But he knew it was advertising enough to open Fog Lawler's eyes to the kid's potentialities. There are many hidden points on which a scout judges a ball player, and Perk, moving swiftly and with his old intuitive deftness, had come up with that double play ball in a laudable manner.

IN THE top of the eighth, Perk handled one chance, going to his right to pick up a slashing ground ball, then making the long throw for the putout.

The Rockets came in for their turn with the willow. With one away, Lefty Dennis leaned into a hook, banging it against the scoreboard. A walk followed and the Colonel hurler also walked—to the showers.

The relief chucker got the next Rocket to top a pitch, and the ball rolled down the line, hugging it so tightly that the third-sacker played it to go foul. It stayed fair and the bags were loaded. Dib Driscue went up there and clouted a long fly ball into left. The runner scored easily from third on the catch, giving the Rockets a 3-2 edge.

The ball park was in an uproar, the call booming for Perk to poke one over the fence, and the Colonel right fielder moved deep against the fence. Big Moose admitted to himself that a home run blast in this spot would cinch a try-out for Perk with the Panthers.

Perk took a strike, a slow ball. The pitch came in again, and Big Moose saw Perk shorten up on the stick and take a half swing. The horsehide plopped into short right field. The Colonel second-sacker raced toward the sinking ball. The Rocket fans groaned. Running with his back to the infield, the second-sacker lunged at the ball.

It slid off his finger-tips and two more Rocket runs pounded home, Perk going into second.

Big Moose knew then what had been missing from the Rocket attack all along. Perk had been going for home-run belts and passing up run-scoring knocks. This time he had gone for a base hit instead

of pulling for the fence and it had paid off in the team scoring.

The game was settled in the eighth. Hub Martineck followed Perk at the plate, singling. When the Rockets were finally retired, they had the game in their pockets, 7-2.

That was the final score.

The hiss of the showers and rattling of lockers had subsided and Big Moose sat alone in his office. At intervals, he glanced toward the door.

Then, finally, it opened and Fog Lawler came in.

"How'd you like him, Fog?" Big Moose said. "He was a little shaky in the beginning, but he got hold of himself."

Fog shook his head, grinned. "Everybody in this burg, including you, Moose, seems to think I came here solely to scout Perk Prather. Naturally, I was interested, hearing so much about the guy. But that wasn't what really brought me here, Moose."

"You got to give the kid a chance, Fog," Big Moose said. "You see the way he shortened up and punched when he could have swung for the fence?"

"Sure, I saw it," Fog said, "and I saw a lot of other things, too. But the guy I came here to get is Big Moose Jordan. I guess if I'm going to be manager of the Panthers, I can pick my own coach. The announcement will be made in a couple of days."

Big Moose felt something tighten in his throat. He could find no words. Then Fog was saying:

"I had a little chat with Perk. He had a lot of wrong ideas about you ruining his old man's career, Moose. He's a big boy now and I figured that knowing the truth about things would do him more good than harm. You don't mind your old roommate kind of taking things into his own hands, do you, Moose?"

"It's been a long time since I was up there, Fog," Big Moose said.

Fog Lawler laughed. "You always belonged, Moose."

"But what about Perk? Did you see that play he made in the seventh when he—"

"We've got a spot for him," Fog cut in. "On a farm club. He needs a couple of more seasons in the minors."

Big Moose Jordan relaxed. He was thinking about the pennant stretch days ahead.



The defense men surged in on Grambo Iponi, bats flailing

GRAMBO THE GREAT

By ROGER FULLER

When it came to dishing out pure mayhem on the lacrosse field, Dana Clarke and his teammates had no peers until Grambo Iponi, the stranger from South Africa, came along!

OLD Ray Van Ault used to say that the way to breed the perfect lacrosse player would be to take a man who was a combination bare knuckles fighter, marathon runner, and high wire walker and mate him with a female motorcycle racer. Maybe that's exaggerating it a little, but not by much, at that.

Ray was a great one for settling deeper and deeper in his chair at the club with each succeeding highball and snorting a

little louder each time the name of a present-day lacrosse great was mentioned. To hear the old boy talk, lacrosse had descended to such levels that in these times it rated with the debating team and the chess club for violence afield.

"Now, in *my* day—" he would say, and that would be the signal for the initiated, comprising most of the club members, to gather up their own drinks and silently steal away, if possible. However,

it was seldom possible. Old Ray Van Ault had a way of pinning a man to his chair with a glare from the steely eyes that looked out from under those bushy eyebrows.

Ray was a member of the Old Guard, with capitals. He had played lacrosse, to hear him tell it, back in the days when the Indians first taught it to the white man and the game used to range over twenty or thirty miles of wooded terrain. History has it that hostile Indians once took a Colonial stockade by playing lacrosse outside the walls of the fort, making a successful dash for the open gate when the white soldiers got over-interested in the game. But Ray used to snort about that story.

"All it would have taken to save the fort," he'd say, "would be a defense man I saw play on the old Crescents. That man would have body-checked a whole tribe of Indians out of play without drawing a deep breath."

They might have snickered at the old man, behind his back, but they had to admit that he knew his lacrosse, even if he did threaten to become a bore on the subject, at times. Ray Van Ault might not know who was Vice-President of the United States, or the representative from his own congressional district, but he could tell you the makeup of the 1910 All-American lacrosse ten without having to wrinkle his brow.

HE HAD played with the best, and he had coached some of the best teams ever put on a field before his arthritis exiled him to his chair at the club, with the exception of an occasional painful excursion to see some game that had been labeled by the papers as a probable lulu. He always went to present-day games under protest and while he might shriek himself hoarse and bruise the shoulders of his companions with his fist-thumpings during the game, his verdict always was the same when he returned to his throne at the club.

"Patty-cake lacrosse," he would growl. "That young feller who was supposed to be so good out there today—he wouldn't have lasted three minutes against the Hopkins team of '28. Now, there was a team. I remember—"

And so on, *ad infinitum*.

It was one winter's evening, a dry, stinging snow driving down outside, when I found myself a prisoner of Old

Ray Van Ault in the club lounge. The other regulars either had decided the night was too bad for the drive downtown, or possibly, had been mysteriously forewarned that Old Ray was in an especially garrulous mood that evening. In any case, nobody showed up to relieve my burden and Ray cornered me as soon as I poked my nose into the lounge and kept me pinned down, in spite of all my feeble attempts at escape.

I finally reconciled myself to my situation and began ordering drinks for the two of us. I planned either to knock the old man out with a succession of highballs or induce in myself that pleasant glow in which even the most crashing bores can sound interesting.

I've learned later that my intentions as regards knocking out Old Ray Van Ault were ridiculous, he being as much of an Old Guard highball-sipper as he was a lacrosse authority. But I did get the glow that was my alternative, and gradually I relaxed as Ray's words surged against my ears, uninterruptedly as the pound of surf on a sandy beach.

I heard again the old, familiar stories. I listened to the names of the old days of Swarthmore's famous tens, of Mount Washington Club and the Crescents, of the Johns Hopkins immortals, and the fabulous stick-wielders of St. Johns, Maryland, Cornell, Army, Penn, Yale and Navy. I heard of Hobart's greats, and Harvard's long-gone goalies, of Rutgers and Princeton and Syracuse. I heard names I recognized and more that I never had heard before. The fire in the fireplace crackled a sort of accompaniment to Ray's recitation of lacrosse, down through the ages.

It was while I was on my sixth drink, I think, that I heard about Grambo Iponi. Or maybe it was my seventh. Anyway, I was half-dozing, reclining on my spine, watching the reflections of the fireplace on the ceiling, when I heard Ray say:

"After that, of course, they had to get rid of Grambo. They simply couldn't let him play after a thing like that. It would give the whole game a bad name."

He shook his head as I opened my eyes past their half-mast position.

"It was—murderous" Old Ray Van Ault muttered.

I sat up straight at that one. Never, in all the time I'd know Ray Van Ault, had I ever heard him complain that any part of lacrosse was brutal. I'd heard

him laugh merrily while describing some particularly gory bit of mayhem practiced by one of his team-mates or charges on some fellow human. His scorn for what he called patty-cake lacrosse—meaning any game in which a majority of the contestants had not been carried off the field, feet first—was a byword.

"Huh?" I asked. "What was murderous?"

"Why, what I've just been talking about," Old Ray said, touchily. "The whole business about Grambo Iponi was murderous."

"I'm sorry," I said contritely, "but I missed the part about this—er—Grambo Iponi. He was a lacrosse player?"

"The best lacrosse player," Old Ray Van Ault said reverently, "I've ever seen. Except for his faults, he would have been to lacrosse what Babe Ruth was to baseball, Dempsey to boxing, Grange to football."

"Tell me about him," I said, reaching for my highball glass. I wanted desperately to hear about a man who, by Ray Van Ault's own admission, was too rugged for lacrosse.

The old gaffer gave me an irritated look and brushed at his military moustache with the back of one hand.

"Look here," he fretted, "I've just got through telling you all about Grambo."

"Tell me again," I coaxed. "Please."

And this is the story I heard. . . .

I WAS coaching Newhall in those days (Ray said) and Newhall had one of the roughest, toughest squads it has ever been my good fortune to monitor. I remember the team well. Benson was at goal, and he had six straight shut-outs in one season. At point we had Cady, who was murder on attack men trying to come around from behind the net. At cover point we had Mulligan and he, with our first defense, Wacker, kept our "horn" well guarded. Thorne was our second defense and Sisk was our center. Second attack was Damaraski, first attack was Eccles, out-home was Josephson, in-home was Clarke. And there they were, the finest aggregation of our day—until Grambo came along.

It was something to be a member of the Newhall lacrosse varsity in those days. We always had more than a hundred and fifty men trying out for the team each spring, and after the preliminary scrimmages had knocked out about

a hundred of them, there were fifty of the finest working to get those ten positions. Ah, those practice sessions we used to have! I've seen as many as six men laid out at one time during a scrimmage between the first and second teams.

It was glorious. Of course, nowadays, with this patty-cake lacrosse they play, almost anybody with two arms and two legs and the ability to walk across a field without collapsing can wear a Newhall "N", with crossed bats, but back then it was different. I remember the time—but you want to hear about Grambo.

We took on the best of them. Lacrosse was Newhall's major sport, then, instead of badminton or croquet or whatever they play now, and we had a strenuous schedule each year. Navy, Cornell, Hopkins, Swarthmore, Army, Maryland—we took them all on and we beat them all. We took on the lacrosse clubs, from the B.A.C. to Mount Washington to the Boston Lacrosse Club and so on, and we beat them, too. Most of them, we beat so badly that there began to arise the doubt that any of them would schedule us for the succeeding years and, I'll admit now, I was sorely tempted at times to tell the squad to lay off a bit and take a game by a relatively tight score such as, say, twenty to one.

Yes, I'll be frank to say that the Newhall squad of those days was perhaps the most perfect lacrosse aggregation ever assembled. To get a berth on that club was to endure a rigorous training period such as is undreamed of in these days. I remember, as coach, drilling the boys in hard, all-out scrimmage from nine o'clock one morning until ten o'clock that night. How did the players see the ball? In those days, m'lad, the Newhall lacrosse team was good enough to play lacrosse by *instinct*. Each man knew, by the position of each man on the field, where the ball should be and who should be working it, and they were capable of playing in pitch darkness, following the flights of the ball by the swish of the lacrosse bat as a throw was made and the tiny *plunk* of the oval striking the cords of the receiver's stick.

Another drink? Thank you.

As I say, we were having a most successful season when this Britisher showed up at Newhall. His name was David George Llewellyn Burkes-Kean and he came from someplace in South Africa. He was immensely wealthy—had some-

thing to do with diamond mines, I believe—and there was a bit of mystery attached to his whole background.

Might have been a member of British royalty, for all I know, but I do remember that his car was the biggest on the campus, his fur coat—they wore them in those days—was the most luxuriant, and his apartment, which he had redecorated at his own cost, was the meeting-place for all the campus heroes as soon as word got around as to the type of entertaining Burkes-Kean provided.

Such food! Such drinks! Such distinguished guests! It was a dull evening when Burkes-Kean didn't have two or three Follies stars, a brace of beautiful artist's models, the reigning debutante of the hour and perhaps the authoress of the day's best-seller on hand for one of his *soirees*. In those days, university students knew how to entertain; there was none of this juke box and coke type of hosting.

Yes, David George Llewellyn Burkes-Kean cut quite a swath in Newhall undergraduate society. He could have been the most popular man on the campus except for one thing. He disliked, absolutely detested, any form of sport more rigorous than badminton.

EVEN that would have been all right except for the fact that Burkes-Kean fell in love with Miss Mary Jeanne Whitcomb. Miss Whitcomb, who went by the euphonious nickname of "Pidgie"—some diminutive of pigeon, I believe—was one of the more beautiful, better mannered debs of the day and, until Burkes-Kean appeared on the horizon, was the acknowledged fiancée of Dana Clarke, our in-home man, our captain, and our outstanding star, if the team had one.

Dana was a big boy, about six feet three and weighing close to two-twenty, and not an ounce of fat on him. If the Newhall squad was rugged, Dana Clarke was the roughest, toughest player on the ten. In all the games we played while Clarke was at Newhall, he never had to be substituted for, while, on the other hand, the point and cover point who played against him used to average three substitutions a quarter.

If Dana Clarke had any tender emotions, they were centered around Pidgie Whitcomb. Why, I've seen that great brute, who only the day before had been

responsible for a half-dozen broken legs and arms, moon at that slip of a girl like a poet regarding the first crocus of Spring. She had but to crook her finger to bring him running and, when she so desired, she could lead him around like a trained bear with a ring in its nose. It really is astounding how a pretty woman can—but you want to hear about Grambo.

As I said, Burkes-Kean fell for Pidgie and his interest was reciprocated, to say the least. The Britisher might not have known a lacrosse bat from a pogo stick, but he was a glamorous figure, as I've explained. And it wasn't long after they met before I began to notice that Pidgie was with Burkes-Kean more often than she was with Dana Clarke.

It was obvious that my star man was suffering from this transfer of affections on the part of the beautiful Pidgie. Instead of knocking out half a dozen men during the course of an afternoon's practice, Clarke was moodily contenting himself with mangling a mere one or two second team defense men who persisted in getting in his way. It was after Clarke scored only six goals, against Yale one afternoon, that I decided that steps would have to be taken.

I had a talk with the lad and it was as I had suspected.

"I can't keep my mind on the game, Coach," he confessed. "It's Pidgie and that guy from South Africa. I guess I have a broken heart."

Usually, of course, I keep hands off of the love affairs any of my charges become involved in, but this was serious. With Clarke scoring a shabby six goals and letting Yale man after Yale man body-check him without suffering fracture, sprain, or contusion, I knew that steps had to be taken.

After all, my contract at Newhall called for lacrosse victories on a spectacular scale and I knew that there was no telling, if events were allowed to run their course, whether I'd be able to equal my previous season's record of three hundred and six points scored against eighteen points scored against us and that, to say the least, would have been embarrassing.

You'll remember that I said that Burkes-Kean didn't care for sports of any type. Therefore, you'll deduce, there was no reason why I should concern myself about his personal safety.

"Dana, I said, in a fatherly voice. "Miss Whitcomb is a great admirer of manly strength. This interloper obviously needs a lesson taught him. I suggest that you teach the fellow in no uncertain manner that his attentions to your fiancée are not welcome."

He didn't seem to take to my suggestion with as hearty favor as I had expected.

"I don't know, Coach," he told me. "It would be sort of like hitting a baby to take a poke at that guy."

"Serious situations," I told him, "require serious treatment. Or perhaps you intend to stand by the sidelines and watch this man from South Africa abscond with the delectable young lady you had intended making Mrs. Clarke."

That, as I had suspected, reached him. He donned a particularly fierce scowl and went out to look for David George Llewellyn Burkes-Kean. I trailed him at a discreet distance and I was within earshot when Dana finally met up with his rival outside Ye Olde Campus Shoppe.

"Look here, Burkes-Kean," Dana growled. "I want to talk to you."

"I'm listening, old boy," the Britisher said, cheerfully, little knowing that he stood close to the brink of disaster.

"Pidgie Whitcomb," said Clarke, in a grating voice, "happens to be my girl. And I'd thank you if you let her alone."

THIS Burkes-Kean boy was a good-looking fellow, I'll admit, in a non-athletic way. He had a smile I imagine most women would term "cute" and he used it on Dana Clarke now.

"I say," he said. "Isn't it rather up to the young lady whose company she prefers? I mean, it's hardly pukka to go around givin' orders as to who she might go out with and all that, is it?"

Dana doubled up a fist the size of a twenty-two pound Smithfield ham and waved it in front of Burkes-Kean's aristocratic nose.

"I dunno what you mean by pukka and that stuff," he growled, "but this hand'll give some orders around here, if you don't lay off."

Burkes-Kean looked at the fist carefully and then smiled up at Clarke.

"I think I see what you mean, old boy," he said, in a mild sort of voice. "If I don't — er — cease my attentions

to Miss Whitcomb, I can expect to be roughly handled, what?"

"You get the idea," Dana said.

Burkes-Kean thought that over and clucked his tongue.

"Y'know," he said, calmly, "I think you lacrosse chaps have the idea that you can solve all your little personal problems by brute force, and that's wrong, y'know."

"It'll do until I find a better way," Clarke grunted.

"I see," the Britisher said, meditatively. "Because you're capable of playing a fair game of lacrosse against minor competition, you think—"

"What did you say?" Dana Clarke asked, and I give you my word he was shocked at the slander. Minor competition, indeed! Newhall was meeting and beating the best in the country, week in and week out.

"I said that you do fairly well against minor competition," Burkes-Kean repeated, in his easy voice. "I—well, I'd rather enjoy seeing you go up against the Nairobi lacrosse team, back home."

Dana Clarke scowled at the Britisher suspiciously.

"I never heard of them playing lacrosse in South Africa," he said.

Burkes-Kean shot his blond eyebrows up in an expression of pure amazement.

"Never heard of the Union of South Africa Lacrosse Association?" he asked. "Do you mean you've never heard of the good old U.S.A.L.A.? Impossible, old boy!"

"What is it?" Clarke asked bluntly. "Some grammar school kids' league?"

Burkes-Kean allowed himself a quiet smile.

"Hardly," he said. "Of course, we play a slightly different game in South Africa than you do here. You'll pardon me for saying this, but you'd be laughed off a South African field for playing the type lacrosse you exhibit around here."

"Laughed off the field!" Clarke howled. "What do you mean?"

The Britisher shrugged and waved a hand.

"Too mild, old boy," he said. "The kind of game that's played in my country would—well, it would frighten you, I believe."

My big lacrosse star took a backward step and thrust out his lower lip.

"I don't believe you," he growled.

Burkes-Kean shrugged again.

"Your privilege, old boy," he said. "But if you could see—"

He broke off and stared at Clarke with what obviously was the birth of an idea shining in his face.

"Y'know," he said slowly, "a friend of mine, rather a good lacrosse player—South African style—is coming over here for a visit soon. I'd like you to get permission for him to work out with the Newhall squad, if you can, just to give you an idea of how we play the game back home."

Then he shook his head, regretfully.

"But no," he continued. "Coach Van Ault wouldn't thank me, I'm sure, for wrecking his team. No, on second thought, we'd better forget the whole thing, Clarke."

"Look," said Dana, getting red in the face, "you tell this friend of yours to come any time he wants to, and work out with the squad for as long as he can stay on his feet, which won't be very many minutes, I'll guarantee you."

Burkes-Kean kept shaking his head regretfully.

"Hah!" Clarke said, his voice rich with scorn. "Just like I thought. I'll bet they never even saw a lacrosse bat in South Africa."

HE SAID some other things that I won't repeat here. Suffice it to say, that they were enough to put the Britisher's mouth into a thin line, and make his face pretty pale.

"All right, Clarke," he snapped finally. "You've asked for it. I'll wire my friend to get here as soon as he can. But remember, I've warned you about him."

"Bring him on," Dana Clarke jeered. "And when I get through giving him the treatment, I'll look you up again."

I didn't see Grambo Iponi arrive at Newhall. Those who did said he was chauffeured down to Newhall from New York in one of Burkes-Kean's cars, driven by his chauffeur. They told me later that Grambo was wrapped up in a polo coat, despite the warm weather, and wore a felt hat pulled low over his head, dark glasses—and they were a rarity in those days—and kid gloves. To top it off, I was told, the fellow was wearing, of all things, a pair of galoshes although it hadn't rained in some time in our part of the country.

"Can't stand the climate," Burkes-Kean told anybody who was curious

enough to ask about Grambo's strange attire—which was almost everybody on the campus. "He comes from a very hot section of South Africa and he suffers dreadfully from the cold. Hated to make the trip, as a matter of fact. Only did it because of our long and enduring friendship, y'know."

Grambo moved into Burkes-Kean's apartment in town and stayed there. All Burkes-Kean's friends thought it was strange that the Britisher didn't have some kind of a reception for his friend, to introduce him around, but Burkes-Kean explained that the parties he'd planned had been called off at Grambo Iponi's request.

"Frightfully shy," Burkes-Kean explained. "Hates things social."

"Too shy to get out on the lacrosse field tomorrow, I suppose," Dana Clarke said.

"Oh no," Burkes-Kean said, airily. "I fancy he'll be out there to scrimmage with you boys."

Naturally, I was eager to see this South African lacrosse player in action. I'd looked up all my references and made some inquiries and I'd been unable to find any mention of a U.S.A.L.A. or anything about lacrosse in Africa. The people I asked, authorities on the game every one of them, couldn't help me out much, either. I had about reached the decision that Burkes-Kean was bluffing with his talk about rough lacrosse, as played in his homeland.

And then Grambo Iponi came out to practice.

He arrived at the field fully dressed for play. He was wearing a helmet that came down low over his forehead, a curious jersey with long sleeves and sweat pants. The day was hot and I wondered, at the time, how the fellow possibly could stand all that covering.

Burkes-Kean was shepherding him around like a dowager chaperon with a debutante.

"He doesn't speak English, you chaps," he told the people who approached him for an introduction, "and, as I said, he's terribly shy. You'll pardon his seeming lack of manners, I know, but it's only because he doesn't know the customs of the country."

And then he would string out a series of grunts which, apparently, was Iponi's language and Iponi would nod his head and reach out with one of his huge,

gloved hands and give a shake to the man being introduced.

I was about fifth in line to meet the stranger and when Grambo took my hand in his I thought I'd been unfortunate enough to get my fingers caught in a clothes wringer. The South African just seized my hand, wrung it out until I was sure there wasn't a whole bone left in it, and then dropped it as abruptly as he'd taken it.

Now, in those days, I prided myself on my ability to give a man a good handshake. None of this wishy-washy, limp, dead fish stuff for me. But when I got through meeting Grambo Iponi, I'll admit, I flapped my hand back and forth several times to revive the circulation.

"Well, Mr. Iponi," I managed to say, "we're anxious to see what kind of lacrosse you people play in South Africa. From what I've heard, it's a little more strenuous than our brand. But we'll try to make things interesting for you, if we can."

BURKES-KEAN translated for me and Iponi looked at me from under the visor of that big helmet and nodded. I remember thinking then that I might have met homelier people in my day but, at the moment, I couldn't recall any man I'd met who was as ugly as Grambo Iponi. His face, what I could see of it behind the wire guard, looked like something out of a bad dream.

He was a big fellow; not so much tall as thick. I could see the muscles ripple under that silly jersey he was wearing and I thought to myself that Dana Clarke would have to be on his mettle today to inflict the punishment he'd set out to score on this strange friend of David George Llewellyn Burkes-Kean.

"What does your friend play?" I asked Burkes-Kean. "Is he a defense or attack man?"

"I'll tell you, Coach," the Britisher said, with a smile. "In South Africa we don't zone the players as you do here. I mean by that, any position on the field can play anywhere. There's no requisite that so many defense men must be on one side of midfield or the other. It's a sort of play-and-let-play arrangement."

"That suits me," Dana Clarke put in. "We'll call off the rules, for this session, and let your pal play wherever he feels like playing."

"Perfect," Burkes-Kean nodded, smiling. He grunted something to the stranger beside him and Grambo nodded again.

"Let's go," I said. "And warn your friend that we play lacrosse rough, here at Newhall."

Burkes-Kean just smiled blandly at me.

The big stranger loped out onto the field and took a defense position with the second team. He handled a bat rather awkwardly and he looked slow afoot, at first. Matter of fact, I remember having a twinge of conscience as I watched him amble out onto the field, knowing that all the first string players, Josephson, Mulligan, Damaraski, Eccles, and the rest were all determined to back up Dana Clarke to the utmost in proving to Burkes-Kean that his precious South African brand of lacrosse didn't belong on the same field with the Newhall type of ball.

The centers faced off and the ball was flipped to Damaraski. He came down the sidelines as the first team's attack spread into scoring position. Damaraski threw to Clarke and the big attack man headed for the net.

He started, I say, but he didn't go far. From the sidelines came a harsh, guttural cry uttered by Burkes-Kean, and Grambo Iponi, the lacrosse player from South Africa, went into action. He crossed that field in absolutely nothing flat and he avalanched on Clarke from, it seemed, all directions.

Now, Dana Clarke was a strong man and a mighty good lacrosse player. For many seasons, opposition defense had been pouring it on him, and never had they stopped him more than momentarily. He had a way of actually carrying the ball and, at the same time, laying on the wood with his bat, so that the defense man brash enough to come in on him, reaching for the ball, more often than not found himself stretched out on the turf, wondering why the fifteen to the junction had left its tracks and come across the lacrosse field.

Dana was waiting for the big stranger to come in and I saw him set himself for a combination hip-throw, elbow jab, hard downthrust with his bat, and a trip. Officially, of course, most of those maneuvers were against the rules, but at Newhall in those days, we played everything we could get away with.

Yes, Dana Clarke set himself to give

Grambo Iponi the complete treatment, but things didn't work out that way. I don't know to this day exactly what happened, but I saw a scuffle, a surge, and then Dana Clarke went pinwheeling through the air to land in a lump some fifteen feet from the place where he'd met Grambo.

As I looked, my eyes starting from my head, the chap from South Africa started down the field. He tried no feints, practiced no deception, made no attempt to reverse his field. He simply pointed his nose toward the opposite goal and took off.

The defense men surged in on him, of course, bats flailing. They might as well have tried to stop a battleship going down the ways. I admit I was pop-eyed as I watched one after the other of my star defense men go bouncing off Grambo's shoulders, his head, his arms, his hips, his legs.

CADY, one of the most delightfully vicious defense men it has ever been my honor to coach, tore in with his big stick held in front of him like a lance. It was Cady's specialty to get the ball-carrier's chin on the point of his bat and ram the stick home, all in a smooth motion that few referees could see in action.

Cady got his stick in position, all right, and jabbed hard. There was a splintering noise and Cady was left standing there, ashen-faced, with the handle of the bat in his fists, the basket end of the stick on the ground, a twisted wreck, and Grambo Iponi keeping on toward the goal.

Benson set himself at the goal and it was often said that when Benson really put himself to his job, it would be impossible for a ray of light to flash past him into scoring territory, he was that fast.

Grambo was chugging up the center of the field, his eyes on the net and the waiting Benson. Just before he hit the crease, there was another hoarse cry from Burkes-Kean and the big man from South Africa stopped running. He looked around, brushed off a couple of desperately hammering defense men, and then hurled the ball at Benson.

It was an easy save, the ball flying through the air in a straight line, right at the goalie's chest. Benson straightened and put up one of his big padded

fists. He caught the ball all right, but he didn't stop the goal. That ball was traveling so fast, and with such force, that it swept Benson around on his feet like a subway turnstile and then plunked into the cording behind the goalie. It didn't stop there. The ball ripped through that heavy cording and kept on traveling until it hit the concrete retaining wall of the stadium. There, it stopped, after biting a sizeable hunk out of the masonry.

"You see?" David George Llewellyn Burkes-Kean said, in his mild voice. "I told you chaps they played a rather rough game where I come from."

I turned to the smiling Britisher standing beside me.

"Burkes-Kean," I said, in a prayerful voice. "You love your Alma Mater, don't you?"

"Oh, quite," he said.

"Then it's up to you," I said, "to see that this friend of yours, this Grambo Iponi, is registered here at Newhall today, right now."

The Britisher looked dubious.

"I don't quite know how that could be arranged," he said. "After all, he doesn't speak English and he'd hardly shine in a classroom, you know."

"Leave that to me," I said. "Anybody who can hip-flip Dana Clarke like that, who can take Cady's best and run right through him, who can throw a ball like that into Benson and score—well I'd be a pretty sad excuse of a lacrosse coach if I couldn't make some arrangement to enter him here at Newhall, wouldn't I?"

It took some persuasion, but I finally convinced Burkes-Kean that it was his duty, no less, to coax Grambo Iponi to stay on at Newhall.

In those days, I had considerable authority in the way of arranging courses for my good lacrosse players and it wasn't too difficult to get Grambo installed in a course that included music appreciation, horticultural research (which consisted of checking on the daily growth of the dandelions on the lawn outside of North Tower) and similar subjects. Seeing that Grambo didn't understand English, the faculty stretched a point and ruled that it would not be necessary for him to put in any personal appearances in class.

But I had my troubles, too. Dana Clarke never became reconciled to the idea of playing second fiddle to a

stranger from South Africa. Dana always had been the star on every team he had played with and he couldn't accept the idea of listening to another man get the cheers he'd always gotten before. Besides, Dana had lost Pidgie completely now. Miss Whitcomb, having watched him get smeared on the lacrosse field every time he went up against Grambo, apparently decided that his star was in its descendancy and transferred all her affections to David George Llewellyn Burkes-Kean.

Then there was the task of trying to teach Grambo to play a position and stick to that position, instead of cavorting all over the field as Burkes-Kean had said he was accustomed to do in Africa. This necessitated having Burkes-Kean on the sidelines constantly, shouting his South African gibberish at my new star, warning him against breaking all the rules in the book at one fell swoop. During those first games, Grambo spent more time in the penalty box than he did on the field, but those few minutes he played were enough to give us some staggering scores.

HOPKINS was the first school to run up against Grambo, in a Newhall uniform—complete with long-sleeved jersey, sweat pants, and other accoutrements that Grambo insisted on wearing, according to Burkes-Kean. Hopkins had a good team that year and it is nothing against them to say that they lost to us—meaning Grambo—by the score of fifteen to one. They were, to quote the next day's papers, riddled by injuries after the first five minutes of the game.

After Hopkins, we massacred Maryland, lynched Yale, swamped Swarthmore, and mauled Mount Washington. By this time, of course, the press was full of Grambo. He was hailed as the greatest lacrosse man ever to handle a bat and Newhall was termed absolutely invincible, as, indeed, it was.

"We used to think," said one sports writer—possibly Grantland Rice—"that in Dana Clarke we saw the perfect lacrosse man. Little did we dream that somebody would come along who would make Clarke look like a beginner at the gentle art of lacrosse mayhem."

There were many newspaper comments in the same vein and, as you might imagine, they didn't sit too well with Dana. However, fool that I was, I basked

in an idiot's paradise, thinking that nothing could prevent Grambo and Newhall from going along, year after year, making lacrosse history.

It was when we played the Crescents, the second year Grambo was on the team, that the lid blew off, to use an expression.

I heard later that Dana, in some frenzy of thwarted love, proposed again to Pidgie Whitcomb and suffered the awful humiliation of having the girl laugh in his face. A "has-been," I believe, is what Pidgie was said to have called him at the time.

I suspected nothing when we entertained for New York. Grambo, as always, travelled in Burkes-Kean's car. The South African, remember, never mingled with other members of the team off the field. He lived a virtual hermit's existence in Burkes-Kean's rooms when he was not galloping around a lacrosse field, annihilating the opposition. Indeed, it was not necessary for him to attend daily practice, his skill was so perfect. As a matter of fact, toward the end, I discontinued practice for the whole squad. It was not necessary, knowing that Grambo Iponi would be on hand at game time to win for us.

As usual, Grambo didn't put in an appearance at the field until a few minutes before game time. Burkes-Kean had explained that the South African, suffering from acute shyness, disliked crowds intensely and might become unsettled by the avalanche of adulation which was bound to have been heaped on him if he had lingered around the field in the gaze of all those lacrosse fans.

It was just before game time, then, when Grambo stepped out of the car that had been driven up to the sidelines, muffled as always in the strange costume he affected. He stayed close to Burkes-Kean, as usual, and I recall that at the time I thought he seemed a bit nervous, as compared with his usual placidity. Several times I saw Grambo raise his head and seem to sniff the breeze that was sweeping the field. And on two occasions it was necessary for Burkes-Kean to speak rather sharply to him in his native tongue to prevent him from what seemed like an attempt to climb back into the car.

"Can't imagine what the trouble is," Burkes-Kean told me when I made inquiries. "Seems the fellow is nervous

about something, but I don't know what."

I knew it couldn't be the forthcoming game that made Grambo uneasy. The Crescents had a fair club that year, but nothing compared with other teams Grambo had met and slaughtered, single-handed. I put the whole thing down to temperament and waited for the game to begin.

That game was one of the shortest ever played in history. There was the face-off and the Crescents got the ball. Grambo descended on the Crescent ball-carrier, took the ball from him, and started down the field.

It was then that Dana Clarke, cutting across the field, thrust out his hand, directly in Grambo's face. And in Dana's hand was a tiny garden snake.

"Oh, my eye!" Burkes-Kean shouted, standing beside me. "That man Clarke should know that snakes are the only thing they're afraid of!"

"Who's afraid of?" I asked. "What's going on?"

"Watch," said the Britisher grimly, "and mourn the loss of your best lacrosse player."

THEN he shouted at Grambo, but it was no use. The big man, confronted with that ridiculous little snake that would not have frightened a mouse, suddenly went berserk. He dropped his bat and turned to run, with Dana in pursuit. Grambo headed for the sidelines and as he ran he tore at his bulky uniform in hysterical frenzy.

Off came the helmet and off came the jersey. The crowd shrieked at the sight of Grambo's face and head. Maybe I shrieked too, but if I didn't when he lost his helmet I know I did when the jersey came off. I've seen some hirsute men in my day but never anything to compare with Grambo. He was covered with thick, shaggy, coarse hair that was too plentiful to be—human.

By this time, the spectators were fighting to get out of the stadium, the police were speculating between joining the panicky crowd or shooting it out with Grambo, and Burkes-Kean was screaming his head off.

"He's perfectly tame," Burkes-Kean kept shouting. "Don't hurt him! He's a pet!"

He was still yelling when Grambo Iponi hit the crowd and spectators be-

gan going up into the air like grass blades coming out of a mower. Grambo cut a swath through the crowd and disappeared in the distance, picking up speed with every leap.

And that was that. Dana Clarke, crazed by unrequited love, had made investigations—inquiries that I had carefully avoided for the good of the Newhall team—and he had found out that there is one thing and one thing only that a certain type of anthropoid fears, and that is a snake. Any kind of a snake. So, to get revenge on Burkes-Kean and, I suppose, on Grambo who had relegated him to a minor role, he had robbed the game of the best lacrosse player ever known. . . .

RAY VAN AULT finished his highball, signaled a waiter, and relapsed into moody silence, staring at the dwindling fire in the fireplace.

"Did they—did they ever find Grambo?" I asked hesitantly.

"I don't know," Old Ray said heavily. "I was so busy after that, making explanations to the United States Inter-Collegiate Lacrosse Association, the National Collegiate Athletic Association, the A.A.U., the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and a few other organizations, that I never found out.

"David George Llewellyn Burkes-Kean never came back to Newhall," the old man went on. "Neither did Dana Clarke. He and Pidgie Whitcomb eloped during the confusion and, I understand, are now living in West Orange, New Jersey."

I took a hard pull at my drink.

"And Grambo," I said, "really was a gorilla?"

Old Ray Van Ault bristled.

"I never said so," he maintained. "I told my inquisitors then, and I say it now, that it's not a lacrosse coach's duty to pry into his men's private lives.

"Although," he added reminiscently, "if he wasn't a gorilla, he certainly had a taste for bananas. When they opened Burkes-Kean's rooms they found fifteen stalks of bananas in the kitchen."

He accepted the fresh drink from the waiter.

"But that's not proof," he concluded stoutly. "I'm fond of bananas myself. Like them on my cereal. Grambo might have been just a corn flakes fiend."



*They came up to the big
race at Poughkeepsie,
a seething, growling, angry
crew—and Tack Hibbs knew
that only a miracle could
prevent outright mutiny*

WITH a military precision, the Aurora varsity boat hit that sprint beat, driving the splinter of shell up the lake past Nevins Point. Another fifty yards and Ollie Prentiss, the coxy, called for a final ten hard ones.

Setting the pace in the stroke seat, the rangy Tack Hibbs hammered them out and felt the other seven men take them away. He could feel the difference, though, with that junior at Number Four, the powerhouse spot, instead of Al Tracy. Tracy just hadn't shown up this afternoon despite the fact this was the last big workout before the triangular regatta with Syracuse and little Midwestern.

They completed the ten big ones and eased off, letting the shell ride easy. Somebody up behind Tack said, "Why didn't I go out for track? If you want to fall out and quit, you don't have to swim home."

EIGHT MEN AND A MITE

By T. W. FORD



"Here comes Navy!" Ollie Prentiss cried. "If you've got weak hearts — you're licked, meat-heads!"

Tack pulled up the bottom of his half-sleeved athletic shirt and mopped at the sweat on his face. And the coaching launch came swinging in close, little, dynamic, eagle-eyed Spence Jones standing, half leaning on the top of the big megaphone propped upright on the stern seat. The megaphone was almost as big as the coach himself. A former coxswain in his own crew days, he was a slim strip of a man in his early thirties, prematurely grayed at the temples, almost handsome if it hadn't been for the dark-shadowed hollows that were beneath his eyes.

"Very very pretty," Jones purred with that slow smile. "Too bad some photographers weren't around. It would have made a beautiful shot for the Sunday rotogravure section." And then he stripped off his velvet glove, voice crackling. "Only it was lousy, actually! Row like that at Poughkeepsie and you are

going to find yourselves taking a lot of wash!

"You had practically no run on that shell. You were hurrying the recovery and checking your own momentum! And you, Bledsoe—" He levelled a long finger at the red-headed bow oar—"catch that water clean! Bite into it, don't dunk! You, Sanchez!" And he went to work on the husky Cuban replacing Al Tracy that day in the shell. He peeled the hide off him so mercilessly that Tack Hibbs felt sorry for the kid from the Pearl of the Antilles.

"Now we'll try another sprint, gentlemen!" Spence Jones seemed to catch his breath like a tired runner on these last words. He sat down and the launch arched away off to the starboard side.

THEY bit in and moved the shell up to a thirty. It was one of Jones' aides in the launch who barked across the lake

water for the sprint. The sawed-off Ollie Prentiss at the tiller ropes, an intense kid with a mobile face, yapped out the count. And again they hit that sprint, going down the lake, further and further from the boathouse in the Inlet.

Still Spence Jones wasn't satisfied. The launch moved in and he gave them another raking over. There was another sprint. Another. Bledsoe, up in the nose, said he was going to get water on the knees because his tongue was hanging out so far it was down to them.

"All right, take her in," Spence Jones called through the megaphone. The launch turned, took a bone in its nose, and left the shell quickly in the stern as it powered in for the Inlet.

Tack Hibbs cursed softly. They in the shell had a two and a half mile paddle back. Those sprints could have been pulled up the lake instead of away from the boathouse.

They came into the float and racked the shell, a quiet bunch and a little bit sullen. Jones with his biting tongue was a tough guy to work under. Plus that, his being so small, an ex-coxy, made it harder to take. After all, the guy never could have rowed in the shell himself. In his day, he'd been a free rider.

"Doggoned if I wouldn't like to tell that tough-tongued monkey where to head in and then quit him flat!" growled swarthy, black-headed Witzer, the Number Seven. "Jones is out to make a hot showing and get a renewed contract if it breaks our backs!"

Tack looked around quickly, worried lest Spence Jones might be near and overhear. But he saw that the coach's sleek maroon convertible was already gone from the clearing between the boathouse and the trees on the slope of the lake shore. Probably hustling home to get slicked up to take Toni out to dinner, Tack figured, face hardening a little.

Inside the dressing quarters of the boathouse, Bledsoe, an ex-G.I. and a more mature man, was cooling off Witzer. "Bank the fires, boy," he told him. "Sure we're a pack of galley slaves. But crew never was supposed to be a picnic. We leave the spotlight and glamour stuff to the grid men. And you and I want to look hot on the Hudson just as much as Jones does. See?"

Ollie, the coxy, was winding up that portable phonograph he toted all over. Tack moved through the doorway, then

just happened to glance back over his shoulder. And through a gap in the foliage, on the woodland path that branched off from the road up from the boathouse, he glimpsed the broad, slightly hunched back of Al Tracy. Tracy who hadn't reported for practice that day. Tack frowned, then caught at the arm of Mike, the grizzled rigger, who was passing.

"Was Tracy down here, Mike?"

Mike nodded and his wrinkle-fretted eyes twisted to stare down the lake. "Uh-huh. He had some things in his locker he picked up."

"What? Tracy isn't quitting, is he?"

"Not exactly." Mike looked down at the file he carried, then rubbed it gently over the back of a hand. "Mr. Jones caught Tracy smoking last night and fired him off the squad."

Tack cursed through the din of Ollie Prentiss' victrola. "So that's it, uh? So we got woman trouble in the boat!"

He came out of the early show at the movies that evening, six-feet-two of easy-moving ranginess, brown-headed, with a big-featured, affable face. He was an amiable guy, quietly confident of his own prowess. But now Tack Hibbs had a mutinous feeling inside. It seemed tough to boot a man out of the boat over a few petty puffs on a cigaret. Tack knew, though, there was more behind it. That "more" was Toni McEnnis.

Speak of the devil, he thought, when that very moment he saw her step out of the corner soda fountain with another girl. The latter was a diplomat, remembered an errand, and left them alone. Tack and Toni turned up the boulevard toward the private dormitory where she lived, moving under the soft-soughing trees. Tack caught her swinging hand and asked what had happened to the big dinner date.

"Spence phoned he wasn't feeling well," Toni answered, looking up at him. She was a petite thing with hair black as a raven's wing, a deep, quiet beauty in her well-chiseled face. A mouth that was a size too large gave her a hoydenish look when she smiled. In gray slacks and a black sweater, she strode along easily beside him. "I'm worried about him, Tack."

"I refuse to get jealous," Tack drawled, looking down at her.

Their eyes met and both laughed. That was another of the swell things about

Toni. No sham, no little coquettish acts. She had a sound, hard core of plain sense, a clean-cut way of thinking like a man. Though she'd taken her B.S. last year, and with honors, she was staying over for a post-graduate course, specializing in bio-chemistry. And yet the kid could shake a wicked rhumba. Tack thought of that Med course that would come after graduation for him. Thought how swell it would be to have a girl like Toni waiting for him when he hung out his M.D. shingle.

They talked a few minutes in the archway of the private dormitory. "Tack, try to help Spence," she said, dropping a hand on his arm. "He's—he's under a lot of strain."

HE SENSED the undertone of iron in his voice when he answered her. "Sure, ten thousand dollars a year worth of strain. And a contract that's up June thirtieth. I know. Heard from Al?"

Little vertical wrinkles in lieu of a frown formed between Toni's nose and brow as she nodded. "He phoned just before I went out. Tack, he sounded as if he'd had a few drinks. He said something about tying one hand behind his back and mopping up the town with a certain person. Al's such a crazy devil." She blew up at one of the first drops of the slow-falling rain that trembled on the tip of her short nose. "Tack, sort of keep an eye on Spence. I'm worried. He—"

"What you need is to contact the Students Employment Bureau for baby sitters, lady," he said, bringing her up short.

When he left, he didn't even try to kiss her goodnight and was surprised at himself. But bringing up Al had put that bitter taste of gall in his mouth again. And he'd found himself suddenly resenting Toni, too. For she was the crux of the whole thing.

Tack himself, Al, and Spence Jones, the crew coach, were all rivals for Toni. Tack had been dating her for a couple of years, in love with her in his deep, quiet day. Al Tracy, big devil-may-care Al, son of a wealthy manufacturer, had quit playing the field and concentrated on Toni last spring. And this autumn, going into his second year as crew coach, the slim ex-coxy from the Pacific Coast, Spence Jones, had astounded the campus by calmly enter-

ing the lists. And recently, the ex-veteran, Bledsoe, announcing that his wartime marriage to a foreign bride had been annulled, had had two dates with Toni.

That was why Tracy, who could fascinate any woman, had been bounced off the crew for such a minor infraction of training rules, Tack Hibbs figured. Tracy was seen everywhere in his big, black Fleetwood Cadillac with Toni at his side, doll-like against his hulk. Spence Jones had just been awaiting the excuse to land on him. It was dirty pool, Tack thought. Just plain dirty pool.

Two days later, the triangular regatta was almost canceled. After a heavy morning rain, a squally wind kicked up the lake's surface. Midwestern walked away with the frosh race as the Aurora and Syracuse boats were swamped. The jayvee race was postponed and postponed. Finally, as evening approached, the wind dropped somewhat. The jayvee race was cancelled and the varsities went out to row while they could.

"Remember, the Orange has a killing finish sprint," Spence Jones told them at the float. "Don't let them get a real lead."

Aurora got away to a good start, let Midwestern grab the lead. The rough water kept lapping over the gunwales, caused some splashing with the sweeps. The first half mile was stroked off. Then a wind-driven bank of mist rolled over the course, exiling Aurora from the rest of the world for the space of half a minute. When it cleared, Ollie gasped. Syracuse had pulled a sneak.

"Up we go, gang!" he bellowed. "Hit it! One—two—" Then he broke off abruptly and wrenched at the tiller ropes.

The splinter of shell yawed over sharply, rolled as several men were tilted off balance. A fat wave curled over the side, water-logging them.

"Piece of drift! We missed it!" yelled Ollie. "Row, you fools, row!"

Big Tack picked up the beat. They slammed into it, toiling like veritable Trojans, with inches of water sloshing over their feet, trying to catch up. And Ollie Prentiss bailed madly as he tongue-flailed them on.

Fighting hard, Aurora hit the mile mark, the mile and a half, taking out Midwestern, putting open water between them. They were setting a torrid pace. Ollie reported that with the shift of the

wind, Syracuse, inshore, was taking water aboard heavily, falling off on their beat.

"Ten hard ones, now, you muscle heads, and we'll take 'em!" he shrieked.

But Bill Bledsoe, up at the bow oar, caught a crab, burying his oar so deep it looked as if he were trying to scrape bottom. So deep that it took him precious seconds to wrestle it out, breaking the rhythmic beat. It was all over then. Syracuse crossed in front by two full lengths.

Breathing jerkily, as if he'd just stepped out of a shell himself, Spence Jones walked into the dressing room and poured it onto the disappointed heart-sick bunch. His eyes seemed sunken, but they flared with sneering anger repeatedly.

"Well, I hope Syracuse has a nice trip home. They certainly found no excitement over here," he said, shaking his head as if sorry for them. "You men rowed a dumb race. And you admitted you were licked after the first half mile. Of course, I know it's tough getting all wet from the splash—"

Tack stepped forward and opened his mouth to break in. But Dom Gennaro, the usually mild-spoken, retiring Number Five, spoke first. And Chuck Tolls, the Number Three, made a chorus of it, saying almost the same thing.

"Coach, maybe you didn't notice the water conditions!" was the substance of what they said.

"Any jerk can paddle around a bathtub. And Syracuse was rowing on the same water," Spence Jones came back caustically.

"We had to go off course to avoid hitting a hunk of drift, Jones!" Deacon Palmer fired right back. He was the Number Six, a coffin-faced Irishman who'd had two brothers on Aurora crews before him.

"You should have been past that piece of driftwood if you'd been rowing the kind of race I ordered. Or don't you remember?"

No one spoke.

"Syracuse had jumped you for a lead of a length," Jones went on. "And I'd warned you not to let 'em have any real lead! Apparently we got a boat full of alibi artists—but no brains. And maybe not too much heart, either!"

He glared at them while the harsh words echoed in their ears.

THERE were several seconds of ugly silence. Then Ollie Prentiss shrugged. "That was my fault, Jones. That patch of mist hit us and Syracuse sneaked out when I couldn't see 'em."

"Do tell? What the devil did you expect 'em to do, come over and ask you if you were all right in there? Of course they sneaked out then. And other crews will do the same thing to you around those big stone supports of the old railroad bridge at Poughkeepsie, if you let 'em!"

"Win or lose, you always jump all over us," growled Gennaro, dark eyes snapping.

Spence Jones banged the big megaphone down on a nearby table. "Shut up! I'm just crazy enough to try to make a crew out of you not-so-bright apes. Forgive me my stubbornness." He wheeled on red-headed Bledsoe. "And I noticed that whatever chance we had, Mr. Bledsoe, you blasted coming down toward the finish! And you, Sanchez, the way you were splashing on the recovery it looked as if you were staging your own private Venetian water carnival out there!" He broke off abruptly then, breathing hard.

Stork Ludman, his aide and coach of the frosh boat, pulled his lank frame away from the doorway. "Take it easy, Spence."

"I'm all right," the head coach said, low-voiced.

Tack Hibbs didn't understand that bit of byplay. It sounded as if Stork Ludman was warning Jones to lay off the men. Tack stepped out from the others, shaking off Bledsoe's hand that sought to detain him. He'd also noticed the bow oar had had nothing to say.

"Jones," Tack bit off sharply. He'd had about all he could take, and in a vague way, sensed the rebellion smouldering among the entire crew. Somebody had to haul Jones up short. "Jones, we're out there doing the best we can. But, remember, we haven't got the incentive you have. We aren't rowing for a renewed contract!" It was out before he knew it; he hadn't meant to say quite that.

Spence Jones smiled, that ironical, patronizing smile. "I'll have to speak to the grad manager of athletics about some remuneration for you fellas, I guess. Of course, he might demand to see some results for the money ex-

pended. And that would be tough on you men, eh?"

He turned and left, his shoulders seeming to sag with a kind of beaten attitude. Tack, watching him go, choked off his sudden sympathy and told himself he'd just imagined the man's look of dejection.

When he tried to hit the books that night, he found concentration simply impossible. His mind was in that boat, constantly switching off to that crew and the trouble he sensed brewing. He went out for a walk. As he moved off the campus by the southwest gate and onto Stewart Avenue, Carl Witzer pulled up in his battered sedan.

"Hop in, baby. We're just driving around the end of the lake to try to get out of the sound of Jones' voice, that old flatterer!"

Tack saw Rico Sanchez and Babe Tracy, Al's younger brother and a member of the jayvee boat, in the back seat. Tack climbed in next to Witzer. They passed through the college town and out onto the shore road that angled around the upper end of the lake and down along the west side of it. Tack asked Babe about Al and got the reply that Al was cooling off.

Witzer said he'd like to cool off Jones. "For my dough, Jones is part bull and part rat, and you can have him, all or any part! I'm fed up!" He hammered his foot down hard on the gas pedal and the old car careened around a curve on the winding road. Witzer gave it still more gas. He was a reckless driver with a firm faith in his luck.

The swaying, headlong ride, with the headlights probing the darkness like flickering yellow scalpels, released some of the pent-up tension in Tack Hibbs. His thought processes grew clearer, more impersonal. He sought to look at the thing from the coach's viewpoint, remembering how Spence Jones had stepped in here at Aurora last year. He had gone easy on last year's varsity boat, composed mostly of seniors, concentrating instead on the men who were potential varsity for this spring. And with the opening of training last fall, he had really stripped off the kid gloves.

It had been tough, almost vicious
[Turn page]



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coaching. And yet Jones had possessed a peculiar, elusive kind of personal magnetism. When Al Tracy had announced he was going to withdraw from the boat because he had to catch up on his studies, Jones had talked him out of it. Later, Bill Bledsoe had served notice he was going to quit—something about wanting to take a job on the side—and Jones had talked him out of it, too. Yet now, just for sneaking a cigaret, he'd given Al the boot.

As they headed back for town, Tack cut off those thoughts and listened to Rico Sanchez' deep-throated rendition of "Babalu" from the back seat. Maybe he was just conjuring up bogeymen, Tack told himself. Monday, perhaps, when they settled down for the final grind for Poughkeepsie, things would be better. Maybe . . .

COMING into the lower end of the town, they passed the chain factory, the gloomy run-down homes of the old section. They pulled up at the rail crossing as a freight chugged across. The lights of three or four tawdry gin mills sprinkled the heavy shadows. Babe Tracy whistled jokingly at a girl going down the left side of the street.

Glancing out the window on his right, Tack thought the sleek maroon convertible parked carelessly at the curb looked familiar. Then he saw the slight figure beyond it on the sidewalk, half stumbling out of a patch of shadow. The man reeled through a fan of light and into more shadows.

But not before Tack Hibbs had recognized the drunk. Spence Jones! Jones, the coach who'd busted Al Tracy off the crew because he'd committed the cardinal sin of taking a few drags on a cigaret!

Sunday afternoon, feeling he had to talk to somebody, wondering if Toni knew about Spence Jones and his drinking, Tack gave her a ring. Toni was sorry but she couldn't see him. She had an engagement with Bill Bledsoe to drive out to a farm and have Sunday supper with some relatives of his.

Hanging up, Tack muttered half aloud, "So Bill's making time, eh? Wonder when Jones will pry him out of the boat like he did Al Tracy?"

Spence Jones did it Monday afternoon. Bull-chested Joe Scott was

shifted up from the junior varsity and put in at the bow oar in the big boat. It was a light workout, ending with a long, easy paddle. But they were a sullen bunch when they came in.

"Two of Toni's suitors have gotten the hook," Tack told himself in the shower room, although he hadn't forgotten that Bledsoe had caught a crab in that last race. Still that was hardly a bona fide excuse for booting him out of the boat. "Two down, and I'm next, maybe. I wonder when?"

But nothing more had happened when they entrained for Poughkeepsie, Bill Bledsoe accompanying the squad. Strangely, he was cheerful, seemed to bear no grudge. The rest of the bunch were tight-nerved and with little hope. Outside of rousing their antagonism by his biting criticism, Jones had them about convinced that they had little chance.

Then — Poughkeepsie itself. The broad-bosomed Hudson, flowing majestically between the great bluffs. Navy went by with a snappy, lashing beat as they crossed to their boathouse on the West Shore. Spirits perked up some now that they were on the scene of combat.

"The Huskies'll have to pour on the coal to slap down that Navy boat! Look at that final punch at the end of the drive!" said Witzer. The Washington Huskies were the pre-race favorites.

They went up through Highland to the big country place where they'd live and unpacked their bags, itching to get their shell out on the water. A half hour after their arrival, Jones drew in in the maroon convertible, he and Stork Ludman, his assistant, having driven east. They went down to the boathouse, shipped their shells. And by the time they'd paddled up to Krum Elbow and come downstream a mile at a fast clip, all the lift was out of the gang. It was the old story of Jones and his acid-tipped, glib tongue.

And he topped it with a little act when the Big Red of Cornell came booming downstream as the Aurora boat headed in for its boathouse. Jones ordered them to "let it ride," pointed to the Ithacan boat the while Tack and his men sat with feathered, suspended oars. Driving at a thirty-four with a medium long stroke, getting nice run on the shell, the Big Red did look good.

"All right," Spence Jones said, when Cornell had shot on downstream, "now you gentlemen know what a real crew looks like. Take her in!"

As they showered, flame licked up through the sullen smoke, the pot boiled near the top. They were dead sick of it. Carl Witzer exploded the general attitude into growling words.

"If we're so doggoned putrid, maybe Jones would be happier if we got the devil right out of the boat! For one, I'm ready to!"

Rico Sanchez nodded. "Jones, he'd look mighty foolish with a shell at the starting line and no men in it. Hey? I'm ready any time."

"Cut that stuff!" Tack broke in sternly. "It's a matter of more than Spence Jones. We happen to be here to represent Aurora, gang." That stemmed the tide of feeling then. But he knew things were building fast. And after dinner that night, he decided to have a talk with the coach.

But Jones was climbing into his car when Tack came out on the big veranda looking down on the river, and merely gave him a curt nod when he called, and drove off into the twilight. Stork Ludman came out and stood beside Tack, shaking his head at the tail-light of the vanishing car.

"Don't like Spence driving around the country alone like that," the freshman coach remarked. "Sometimes—well, he has sort of sick spells."

"I suppose it's just the very thought of us, his crew, that brings 'em on," snapped Tack, and walked away. He talked to Witzer and the brooding Genaro and a couple of others before they hit the hay, begging them to keep their tempers in check.

FOR two days there were no further outbursts. Then, on the third day, after a particularly listless workout in the drizzling forenoon, Tack Hibbs found himself out of the varsity boat, replaced at stroke by Ketchum, a junior. Tack almost blew his own top then. It was so rankly unfair, especially after the newspaper prognostication by Rusty Callow of Penn in which he picked Aurora as a dangerous dark horse.

[Turn page]

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Because, Callow had said, the Green boat had one of the smoothest stroke oars on the river that year.

"He's playing petticoat politics!" Tack blew off when Bill Bledsoe tried to calm him down. "It's all because of Toni. First Al Tracy got the old heavenly. Then you. Now—me. Odd coincidence, isn't it, that the three of us happen to be dating Toni McEnnis, the gal Jones himself is after?"

"I think you're wrong, Tack," the ex-G.I. told him gravely. "Honestly. And—remember what you told the other fellas about how we're rowing for more than just Jones alone."

That buttoned up Tack. For three days he pulled the stroke sweep in the jayvee shell, fuming inside like a pent-up volcano, wondering if he ever had been the easy-going, amiable guy folks used to say he was. Nerves grew tauter with the approach of Regatta Day. There was little horse-play on the after-breakfast hikes before they went down to the river. Then, in the last heavy workout, two days before the race, Tack found himself in the varsity shell again. Found himself tearing at the water on the catch with savage power, as if it were a human thing on which he could vent his anger, using it as a whipping boy.

"If I could only put this varsity boat in the frosh race," Spence Jones said with mock ruefulness when they came in. Somebody slammed down the file with which they'd been roughening up the bole of a sweep.

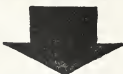
The proverbial straw that fractured the camel's back hit that evening. A bunch of them were lolling around the veranda. Ollie Prentiss shifted a new record onto his portable victrola. The strains of "Stone Cold Dead in De Market" floated out on the dusk as Spence Jones emerged from the house.

"Turn that crazy number off!" he barked harshly. The Coxy just stared, standing rooted in surprise. "Shut that record off!" Jones half yelled, a shrill note almost akin to panic in his voice now.

"Say, coach, what's wrong with it, anyway?"

And then Jones brushed him aside roughly, snapped the platter from the machine, and shattered it over the porch

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railing. The shards of it were still rattling on the floor when he strode down to his car and drove off. Actually, it was an unimportant incident. But it was the spark.

Carl Witzer pushed up out of his chair slowly. "Well, playmates, *au revoir*, pals. Old Man Witzer's pride and joy is packing his bag. Maybe I can catch a sleeper out of Poughkeepsie."

Rico Sanchez rose from the steps. "That makes two of us."

Gennaro stood up too. "Will my cousin down in New York City be surprised to see me tonight!" Other men shifted to their feet. This was it—outright mutiny.

Tack Hibbs thought fast as he saw the varsity disintegrating before his eyes. Then he took the daring plunge.

"Wait a minute, you guys," he said. "A crew doesn't have to quit—if we can make the coach step down! Listen..."

Tack Hibbs didn't like doing it much. But it was the only way. Up in Witzer's room, Tack and Carl and Dom Gennaro drew up the statement, making it sound as legalistic as possible.

[Turn page]

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"We, the undersigned, hereby serve notice that, due to Coach Spence Jones' vituperative attacks and training methods, we find it incompatible with our self respect to remain as members of the crew," Witzer read aloud. "Unless said coach is relieved of charge, on or before the day of the race, our resignations are final." In short, the statement made it plain they would not go to the starting line if Jones was still boss.

Tack signed. Then Witzer and Dom Gennaro. Tack sought out Bill Bledsoe. But the latter shook his head at joining the insurgents.

"Tack, I—I can't. And I think you maybe got Jones sort of wrong. I can't go along—after what he did for me, Tack."

Bledsoe explained, then. Last March, when he'd been about to drop out of crew, it had been because his dad had suffered severe business reverses. And Spence Jones, learning the cause, had lent him three hundred with no strings attached.

"Sure," Tack said wisely. "He needed you in the shell. But he booted you out fast enough when you started seeing Toni."

Bledsoe shook his head. "No, Tack. I asked to be taken out of the shell. Out in the Pacific, I stopped a shell splinter with my head. Since then, I get occasional spells of vertigo. One of those spells was what made me catch a crab against Syracuse. I thought it was better for the crew if I got out of the boat. Spence said I could stay in it if I wanted."

LEAVING him, Tack had his first flicker of doubt. Jones wasn't quite the deep-dyed villain he'd appeared. And, as Bill had said, was it logical for a coach to break up a crew, ruin his chance of a contract renewal, just because of a woman? But Tack came up with the answer for that. It could be Jones' alibi, losing two of his best men, when he faced the athletic committee. A very convincing excuse, too.

Tack hit Rico Sanchez with his petition next, got his enthusiastic signature. Deacon Palmer bucked at signing, saying he felt it was somewhat underhanded. Tolls had conscientious scruples, too. But Treeger, the Number

Two, affixed his John Hancock. And just to clinch it, Tack signed up three members of the jayvee boat, including Babe Tracy, Al's brother.

The next morning, he phoned the Nelson House over in Poughkeepsie. But Woodward, the graduate manager of athletics, was in New York City and would not return until late that night. Tack assured the other signers they'd make it stick if they had to pull it an hour before race time.

It was just a short, easy paddle that day to loosen them up. Jones had practically nothing to say, looking very drawn. That night Tack made three calls to the Nelson House before turning in, and all proved in vain. It would now have to be pulled off in the morning, regatta day.

The big day dawned heavily overcast, muggy. But by noontime, when they were down at the boathouse, the sun broke through, after a brief shower that cleared the air. The atmosphere in the Aurora quarters, though, had an electric tension, everybody on pins and needles.

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"Try another call to Woodward, Tack," Witzer said. "We'll win. They'll have to give in if they want a shell at the starting line."

Tack bumped into Babe Tracy as the latter stepped out of the pay phone booth in the dimness of the interior.

"Better scratch my name off that petition, Tack," he said. "I—well, Al just called to wish me luck. Long distance. I hinted at what was cooking. And he— he told me something."

"Sand running out of your craw, kid?" Tack said.

"No, it's not that. Al said he'd beat my brains out if I backed that petition. He told me why he *really* was fired from the crew. He was at a dance hall outside of town, loaded to the gills, and got in a brawl over some tramp he'd picked up. Somebody phoned Jones and he came out and got the cops to let Al go and hushed up the whole thing. Then he gave out that Al was off the crew for smoking—to save Al's face. That's how it was. So—well, I'm sorry."

After a moment, Tack followed Babe outside without putting through his call. He was learning more and more about the man who was this Spence Jones behind the caustic mask. And he made a sudden decision. He would tell Jones what was up, give him one more chance before the chips were down.

"When do you expect Jones to get here?" he asked Stork Ludman. The coach's car had been gone from the house when Tack came down to breakfast that morning. "Or maybe he can't stand seeing us row in the big one, is that it?"

But somebody sang out that Ludman was wanted on the phone before he could reply. When he returned to the float, he was white-lipped.

"Jones won't be here, Tack. He won't be back—not even for the race," he said unsteadily.

"Where is he?" Tack asked, as several other men turned.

"In the hospital over there in Poughkeepsie," Ludman said, nodding at the other shore. "He had another bad heart attack—worst yet. We got him out of the house early this morning." Ludman brushed a hand over his eyes as somebody murmured an awed invective.

Tack frowned, puzzled. "Another

heart attack, Stork?"

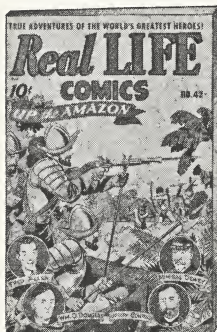
"Yeah. Spence has had a bum ticker for some years. Got worse steadily. That's why I hated to have him driving around alone at night. Back at school, he got one behind the wheel one night, almost crashed into the railroad gates. He staggered out of the car and was picked up in front of one of those downtown gin mills. The doctors had warned him to quit coaching."

Tack remembered the night he'd seen Spence Jones and had thought he was blind drunk. A guilty feeling rose in him. "But, Stark, why was he so crazy to get his contract renewed then? Why was he flailing our hides off to win?"

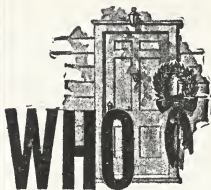
Stork shook his head, looking them over. "He wanted no renewal. This was to be his last year. He wanted a Poughkeepsie winner, that was all. I knew he was rugged with you fellas. But he had high hopes—for himself and in you. Back in March, Spence told me he thought this crew could do it."

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Witzer pushed forward. "What're his chances?"

"They think he'll pull through. He just sent word that I'm in charge for today." The big aide's eyes were bleak. "Now—he won't even see the race. And he thought you could cop if you got mad enough."

Walking over to the front of the float, Tack Hibbs pulled the petition from a pocket, tore it up slowly, and let the shreds of paper drop into the current and drift downstream . . .

AURORA'S frosh boat had never really been in the opening race of the day. The jayvees had staged a hot duel with Columbia for the lead, then folded from too torrid a pace too early, finishing a poor third. Now the varsity shell was about to shove off from the float for the big race, a faint purplish haze hanging over the river as the late afternoon waned. Stork Ludman hunkered down on the float, let his eyes run along the shell.

"This is the way Spence planned for you to row it, fellas," he said quietly. "For the first mile, hang close enough to the pace-setters. When the second mile opens—then go out after anybody, anybody, in front. Pour it on, make your big bid—and catch the leaders. No matter how much it takes! Get it? No matter how much it takes. Then, Spence figured, you'd come home on the nerve and backbone of you in the final mile. That's all, except—good luck, Aurora!"

They paddled upstream, up beyond the judge's boat, swung her around, gave ten good ones, and came down to their stake boat in the Number Five lane. The Wisconsin Badgers were delayed lining up, the coxy talking to his men several lengths upstream before they finally moved to the starting line in their lane. Then Navy had some trouble as their boat was swung off at an angle by the current. And, waiting, chilled inside despite the hot sun, Tack Hibbs scoured himself.

Yes, Spence Jones had been a ruthless driver, galley master, outwardly devoid of mercy. Yet, behind his mask of severity, he had shot square. And all the time, with that heart condition, he had

been driving himself as hard as he'd ever flayed them. This, Tack suddenly knew, was going to be three miles of penance. And then he knew the others in the boat felt the same way, as Rico Sanchez called from the Number Four spot:

"You just give us the beat, Tack boy! We take him away no matter how high you go, Tack. Sure thing!"

And Bill Bledsoe, who'd come back in the bow oar at Tack's personal request, echoed the sentiment with, "I aim to be the first man across that finish line, Tack!"

Then the official started on the prow of the cabin cruiser sang out, "Ready, all?" The flat crack of his pistol set a welter of sounds, like wild thunder, hurrying across the water. The *thunk* of the couplings of the observation train. The staccato bark of coxys. The thrash of eighty sweeps lashing at the Hudson's surface. And the race was on.

Ollie Prentiss brought Aurora down to a steady beat after fifty yards, smacking the gunwales for the rhythm. They settled into a smart thirty-four, eased down from that a trifle, and the butterflies went to sleep in Tack Hibbs' stomach.

Ollie gave them the setup. They were in fifth position with Columbia surprisingly out in the van, setting the pace. Navy second. Syracuse and California in third and fourth. The first half went by with the Huskies coming up to take over fifth in the outside lane.

"Columbia's coming back," Ollie said tensely. "Don't rush that recovery, you'll jump a slide, Rico! Up we go a notch! One—two—"

A smash of sound from the banks as Cornell came sliding up, getting impressive run on the boat, taking the Huskies, driving on up to nose the Navy, now in the lead. Tack could feel the nervousness of the shell at his back. This was a three-mile race as compared to the former four-mile distance of pre-war regattas. Then Tack saw Ollie's eyes bulging over the cone of the aluminum megaphone that was like a misplaced unicorn's horn on his face. So here it was, he thought. The time was at hand to let out and take 'em.

From over to the east came the lashing crackle of the Penn coxy's voice. And

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Ollie said, almost softly, "Now we go!
Ten big ones! Ten! Ready—hit her!"
He chanted the count cadently.

Aurora whipped forward to open the
second mile. The ten finished, they
powered the cedar splinter on at a stiff
thirty-six. California came back to them,
in trouble, their Number Six ghastly
pale and wobbling on the recovery. Penn,
just overlapping them, a light outfit,
matched their drive. Aurora kept hitting
it and Penn eased off and then the Green
shell was jumping Columbia, edging up
on the raw but powerful Big Red boat.
It was a mad pace Aurora was setting at
that stage.

There was a break in the roaring from
the observation train. Then a foghorn
of a voice carried out, "Holy Pete, look
at that Aurora shell! Look at her—look
at that run on her!"

And Ollie said quietly, "Navy's in
front of you by two lengths. You're
even with Syracuse, gang.

Then, without any quickening of the
beat, Aurora added something to the
thrust of that splinter of shell. It leaped
on. The shadow of the old railroad
bridge fell across them. From the tail of
his eye, Tack glimpsed Navy. And Ollie
bit off the command for ten hard ones as
they slid past the big stone bridge stan-
chion that cut off Navy's view of them.

THEY rammed out those ten, darting
from beneath the bridge and into the
famed last mile. Five bombs sounded
from the bridge to indicate the Number
Five lane, Aurora's. It meant that Green
was in front.

"In front, where Spence said he
wanted us at this spot," Tack told him-
self, snapping his big shoulders savagely
as his blade bit water. And another thing
flashed through his brain then. He was
solemnly, coldly mad, but at himself.
And he exulted in the power engendered
by the emotion, for he knew now why
Spence Jones had shunted him back to
that jayvee boat for a few days. Just
to rouse him, to get him burning up.
And he was now, but this time he was
sore at himself.

The shell jerked slightly, the rhythm
going ragged momentarily, and Ollie
called, still calm, "Steady, Bledsoe,
steady, boy!" Fear spiked Tack's heart

an instant but then the driving cadence was back.

Navy, a half length to the rear, ceased to gain as Ollie lifted the beat to a cruel thirty-eight. It was a man-breaking pace. Observation train experts cheered them but shook their heads.

A radio sports broadcaster said into his microphone, "Aurora has been the sensational surprise of the race. But they've shot their bolt and—there come the Washington Huskies now! They're closing in . . ."

Ollie saw them but kept twisting his head to his left to keep an eye on Cornell. The Huskies took out Navy, nosed up on, then overlapped the Green boat, edged up their prow until it was even with Sanchez at Number Four.

"Another ten hard ones!" Ollie ordered. And they slammed them out, beat off the Huskies' sharp sprint, pulled away, going into the last half mile.

Tack Hibbs wondered how much more a man could give, how much more self-punishment he could inflict and absorb. At his back, Carl Witzer was snorting air into his burning lungs.

"Cornell's putting on the heat! I want ten more!" Ollie snapped, voice still calm if hard.

It was murder. They were tearing it off at a forty, arms dead and leaden, abdominal cords curling under the strain. But they gave and Cornell, suddenly splashing under their fierce pace, was beaten off. How much more, Tack wondered. The Hudson was tipping and tilting dizzily before his glassy, sweat-choked eyes.

"Here comes the Navy!" Ollie's voice cried, emotion-packed. "If you've got weak hearts—you're licked, meatheads!"

That indirect reference to Spence Jones did it. For a moment the power in Aurora drive wavered. Ollie splashed water on Witzer. Navy came up, up, shoved their prow past Tack, past the Number Seven, the Number Six. And then they couldn't get another inch. Down that last grueling fifty yards Aurora just held on bulldog-fashion, matching Navy power inch for inch—and going across. On the finish barge, the officials ran up the winner's pennant, the Green of Aurora. They drifted, sagging, spent.

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"Jones will like this," croaked Ollie Prentiss, tears streaming unheeded from his eyes. "Jones'll like this, meat-heads!"

There was the triumphant paddle back up the west shore as they picked up the shirts of the vanquished crews at each float. The crowd on the banks and the train still screaming at them. Then their own float and the traditional dunking of the coxy of the winning boat in the Hudson. Tack was hugged by Bledsoe and Carl Witzer simultaneously. And Babe Tracy finally got through the shouting pushing gang.

"Miss McEnnis called long distance, Tack. Here's the message."

Tack took the piece of paper. "Thanks for what you did for Spence and me, Tack . . . Toni," he read.

Swallowing was a painful process for some seconds. Tack knew then that he'd lost out in that field. The message shook in his big fist. It hurt, hurt like the devil. But he looked out at the big river and grin wrinkles squeezed up his eyes. For a little while that afternoon, anyway, he'd had a bride of his own, a broad-bosomed, blue, steady-flowing bride—that river.

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THE SIDELINE

(Continued from page 3)

Menke gives no approximation of when lacrosse began. Says he—

"... pioneer French-Canadians first saw the Indians at play. The Indian name for it was *baggat-away* and they played it under rules somewhat different from those which govern lacrosse today. But they had the original idea and the Canadians merely made some betterments. . . ."

Now, as for soccer, Menke states—

"It is the original undiluted football game and its origin dates back to England in the 11th Century, with a Danish skul as the first target of the booter."

All of which leaves you, your colleague and the Cap pretty much up in the air. How long the Canadian Indians had been playing lacrosse before the voyageurs discovered them at it late in the Sixteenth Century will probably never be known. It might well have been hundreds of years. But on the evidence at hand, the Cap must give the nod to soccer, Danish skul and all. The original booters must have had some awfully sore toes.

WELL, IT'S AN IDEA

by John Wilmerding

Dear Cap: I have been reading THRILLING SPORTS for quite a few years now and consider it top mag in the sports fiction field. I especially like the stories of Joe Archibald and Tracy Mason.

But here is the point of my letter. A lot of Americans consider football the most rugged game around. But in American football they permit substitutions at will. In Association, Rugby and other football games, no substitutions are allowed—if a man is hurt his teammates carry on as best they can without him. Furthermore, these games are played with only one intermission and time-outs only for serious injuries.

In the beginning, I believe the American game was played under similar restrictions and it was a lot rugged and demanded better player conditioning than the modern game. Why can't the rule-makers restore some of these restrictions. It would make football contests a lot fairer—La Jolla, California.

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that one, John. You're right about the way American football used to be played—and you're right about Association and Rugby. But your request to bring back the pre-Hef-felfinger days is, we fear, a little extreme.

It is the demand for top speed all the time while in action that has caused the numerous break-up periods in the modern game—plenty of time between plays, many time-outs, unlimited substitutes and the rest. The other games, while plenty fast, are necessarily played at a somewhat slower tempo. After all, no one expects sprinter's speed of a marathon runner.

It is highly doubtful that American fans, used to the excitement of a game played on the dead run, would turn out for a slower version.

We do, however, agree about the substitutions. In fact, we have frequently wished for a limitation on the number of players a team can use in a game. About twenty-five, it seems to us, should be the maximum. Certainly it would eliminate those no-contest games between big universities with four-deep squads and smaller institutions with few substitutes to use.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

FOOTBALL rules the world of sports—or will when next we appear in print. So, fittingly enough, the featured novelet in our forthcoming edition will be a story of the Saturday glory of autumn, **SINGLE THREAT MAN** by M. M. Tinney. This is a gidiron story with a difference, too.

Its hero, instead of the routine Jack Armstrong breakfast-food product too familiar to all of us, is a youth of American-Polish extraction who spent the war years trapped in the Nazi occupation of his European homeland. Returned to America and enrolled at a little college, he develops into a magnificent ball carrier—but makes no bones about finding it difficult to take football seriously after what he has been through in Poland.

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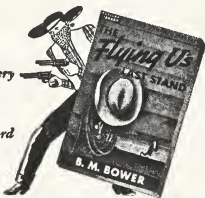


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